

CORONAJIHAD

An Analysis of Covid-19 Hatespeech
and Disinformation



EQUALITY LABS

EQUALITY LABS

Equality Labs works at the intersection of community research, education, technology, and art to support South Asian religious, ethnic, and cultural minority movements dealing with intractable systems of oppression. Equality Labs is the first South Asian American human rights and technology start-up whose leadership is centered around women, gender non-conforming, trans, and queer people.

ISBN:ISBN Number Here

First published in 2020 by Equality Labs.

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Suggested citation: Soundararajan, T., Kumar, A., Nair, P., Greely, J.

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**CORONAJIHAD: An Analysis of Islamophobic Covid-19 Haterspeech and Disinformation:
The Implications on Content Moderation and Social Media Policy**

Equality Labs, USA.

CORONAJIHAD

AN ANALYSIS OF ISLAMOPHOBIC COVID-19 HATESPEECH

**And Disinformation and it's Implications on
Content Moderation and Social Media Policy**

EQUALITY LABS 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes research by Equality Labs into Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation.

Our findings reveal this form of Islamophobia originated on Twitter, then spread to other social media platforms, resulting in the malicious targeting of Muslims around the world.

We urge social media platforms, healthcare providers, the World Health Organization (WHO), governments and the public to respond quickly to these findings. Without urgent intervention, we are deeply concerned that Muslims in India, South Asia, and around the world will suffer increasing discrimination and bigotry in addition to being denied medical services. Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation could trigger large scale majoritarian violence. We must act collectively to avoid imminent harm to Indian minorities.

KEY FINDINGS

- Hate speech and disinformation targeting Muslims runs rampant across Twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp and other social media platforms. This content originated in India from Hindu Nationalists, but has been amplified by global Islamophobic actors.
- Islamophobic hate speech and disinformation tied to COVID-19 did not appear spontaneously, but grew from established Islamophobic social media accounts, pages and groups.
- The reticence of social media platforms to remove known Islamophobic and casteist handles has led to this crisis.
- Social media staff and moderators should acquire and exercise greater cultural competency, particularly concerning issues of caste and religious minorities of South Asia. Ignorance about Islamophobia during this pandemic has enabled hateful content to inflict direct and immediate harm on millions. The majority of users pushing Islamophobic COVID-19 content are young men between the ages of 18 and 34 based primarily in India and the U.S.

An analysis of the content finds the following most common themes:

- Muslims depicted as the virus and the virus as Muslims.
- Muslims equated with bioterrorism, with the weapon being the virus.
- False claims that Muslims are testing positive for COVID-19 at a higher rate than others.
- False claims that Muslims are intentionally spreading the disease to non-Muslims and Hindus as a form of “jihad.”
- Calls to boycott Muslim businesses including vendors, small business owners and essential workers like domestic workers, cooks, as well as health and relief workers.
- Repeated celebration of the Myanmar-based monk Ashin Wirathu, whose call for genocide has led to his being banned on several social media platforms. Despite this, he continues

to be celebrated on Facebook and Twitter, with Myanmar's boycott and genocide of the Rohingya community offered as a model for how to treat Indian Muslims.

- Social distancing is held to justify illegal, casteist practices of untouchability and to legitimate the social boycotting of Muslims and Dalits. Popular Islamophobic COVID-19 content is amplified by major news media outlets, which compounds the damage.
- While Islamophobia runs rampant in Indian, European and U.S. media, a verification disparity exists between the social media handles of Muslim and Dalit users compared with those of Hindu Nationalists. Minority users must fend off discriminatory content from Hindu Nationalists, the majority of whom are verified by Facebook, Twitter and Instagram platforms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 global pandemic highlights historic inequalities and disproportionately impacts those most vulnerable to the disease. This disproportionate impact is correlated with a rise in disinformation and hate speech. This not only harms impacted minorities, but also prevents accurate scientifically informed public health information from reaching the public and can exacerbate spread while extending the pandemic for all citizens.

That is why tracking hate speech and disinformation is crucial, as it allows us to improve content moderation as well as data collection on social disparities in health, risk and mortality. Content moderation is a complex practice requiring sensitivity to the relevant context and extensive socio-political expertise. With collaboration from civil society advocates and academic experts, improvements in content moderation and data analysis can mitigate harms otherwise invisible or misunderstood.

Who should act immediately to address disinformation and health disparity? We suggest that social media platforms, which sit at the nexus of information sharing and public health, can and must take immediate steps to mitigate the harm to historically vulnerable populations.

Social media platforms must act immediately to curb the spread of Islamophobic COVID-19 disinformation and hate speech. Below, we outline four urgent and necessary steps towards achieving this outcome:

1. REMOVE INCITEMENT

Social media platforms must prioritize the removal and prevention of Islamophobic COVID-19 related disinformation and hate speech immediately. Content that could be stopped with more attentive moderation spreads on these platforms. Delays in addressing this problem mean damage done to hundreds of millions of people. Removal and prevention efforts must take into account the sociopolitical history of Islamophobia and consider how existing white supremacist and Hindu Nationalist networks have contributed to this moment.

Acting with proper knowledge of local contexts is key to prevention. Content moderators should consult with experts in Indian civil society, health care professionals and internet freedom advocates.

2. AUDIT IMPACT

Twitter and Facebook must prioritize an aggressive and thorough human rights audit of the following:

- Their platform's impact on hate speech and religiously motivated related violence.
- Their hiring practices, especially with respect to safety, policy and content moderation teams.
- Content moderation, which should include reviewing hiring practices of contractor firms, contractor demographics and slur lists. These lists should be open and transparent to the public.
- Each platform's policies concerning dangerous hate groups.
- What precipitates investigations, particularly in the case of coordinated discriminatory behavior.
- Biases in the process of identification and verification of accounts.
- Impacts across India's discrete language markets.
- Determinations regarding risk prevention, mitigation and remediation plans for vulnerable communities.

The audit should be in line with the U.N.'s Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which affirms that just as governments have a duty to protect human rights, so too corporate have a responsibility. Facebook and Twitter should conduct Human Rights Impact Assessments to analyze their actual and potential Human Rights Impact. Their findings would then inform a revision of policies and practices to address the human rights risks identified.

Additionally, each platform should empower an independent audit team approved and monitored by civil society advocates, internet freedom experts and the companies. An independent audit should be conducted by a firm jointly agreed upon by civil society advocates and the companies. This audit team must demonstrate clear competencies in caste, religious, gender and queer issues with expertise in both Indian and U.S. market plus include members of Indian minorities.

3. PROMOTE DIALOGUE

We recommend that Twitter and Facebook engage in a more transparent dialogue with internet freedom experts, Muslim civil society advocates and public health officials to promote advocacy, intervention, education and training. This can include regularly convening a working group of Indian internet freedom and civil society groups to consider issues of Islamophobia as well as caste, religious and gender/queer discrimination. This group would review policies and processes at this crucial time.

In addition, we recommend convening an international working group to address Islamophobic COVID-19 disinformation and hate speech. This group should encompass such global stakeholders as Muslim Advocates, Tell Mama, Hope Not Hate, Equality Labs, Indian American Muslim Council, Witness and others with essential cultural competencies.

4. ASSIST SURVIVORS

Twitter and Facebook must establish a remediation and diversity fund for survivors of violence that results from the platform. Countless lives have been impacted by violence incited online, so there must be remediation.

5. SUPPORT FACT-CHECKING PLATFORMS

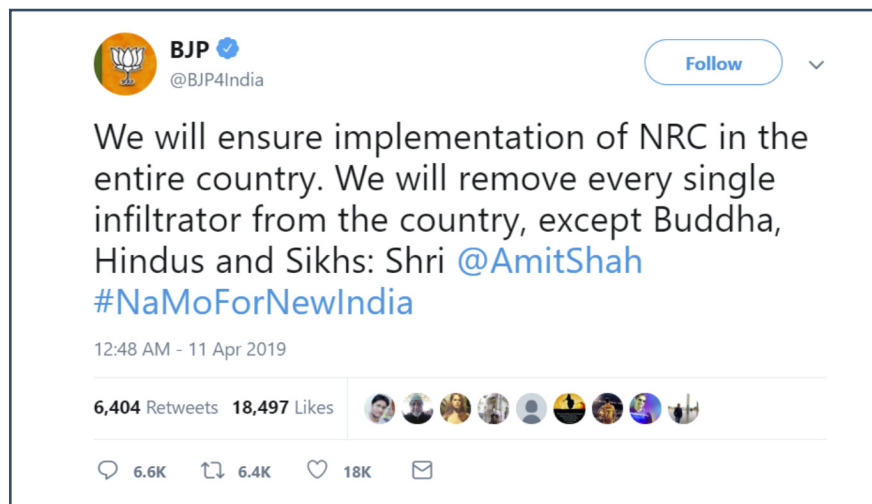
The only widespread counter to Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation has been fact checking platforms that are inundated with the job of vetting viral violent content. Twitter and Facebook should continue to invest generously into these platforms. Additionally, there needs to be more co-design to understand better integration of fact checks into social media platforms so that fact check content can rank higher than trended violent content. We suggest that Twitter and Facebook continue to fund these groups as part of their structural response to this issue.

The actions of American companies have global consequences. The consequences of inaction on these issues are dire. Without a concerted effort to protect Muslim and caste oppressed lives, we fear a catastrophic outcome for millions. We urge Twitter and Facebook to heed this warning and attend to our report.

INTRODUCTION

As millions around the world grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, a disturbing phenomenon of Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation has taken root across all social media platforms. The most egregious example of this content is the Islamophobic hashtag #Coronajihad. This hashtag insinuates that Muslims are terrorists, intentionally spreading the virus as an act of bioterrorism. Unleashed by Hindu Nationalists in India via Twitter, this hashtag is now being used globally on all social media platforms.

#Coronajihad was formulated as part of an ongoing and relentless campaign of dehumanization against Indian Muslims and other caste-oppressed faiths by Hindu Nationalists. This campaign included the now infamous tweet of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, the party of India's Home Minister Amit Shah, declaring the removal of "infiltrators" from India through a national registry. The "infiltrators" in question are the members of the Rohingya community and Bangladeshis. "Infiltrators" is an Islamophobic dogwhistle intended to stigmatize millions of Indian Muslims, Bangladeshi immigrants, and Rohingya refugees.



In this volatile context, Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation arose. Hateful hashtags first appeared as early as March 1, 2020, including the Islamophobic hashtag #Quranovirus appearing with #BanTheBook, referring to banning the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam.

These hashtags were quickly packaged with news about the Tablighi Jamaat (a Muslim missionary movement) conference in Delhi on March 10-13, 2020, which occurred a week before India entered its national lockdown on March 24, 2020.¹

The Muslim missionary movement was fertile ground for the Islamophobic rhetoric to take root in the Indian public sphere. This conference was portrayed as a "super spreader" event intended to harm millions. And yet at the time of the Tablighi Jamaat gathering, there were no government advisories or cautionary actions. In fact, the Indian Health Ministry Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said coronavirus is not a health emergency as late as March 13, 2020, insisting that there was no need to panic. This advisory went against the WHO's declaration of COVID-19 as

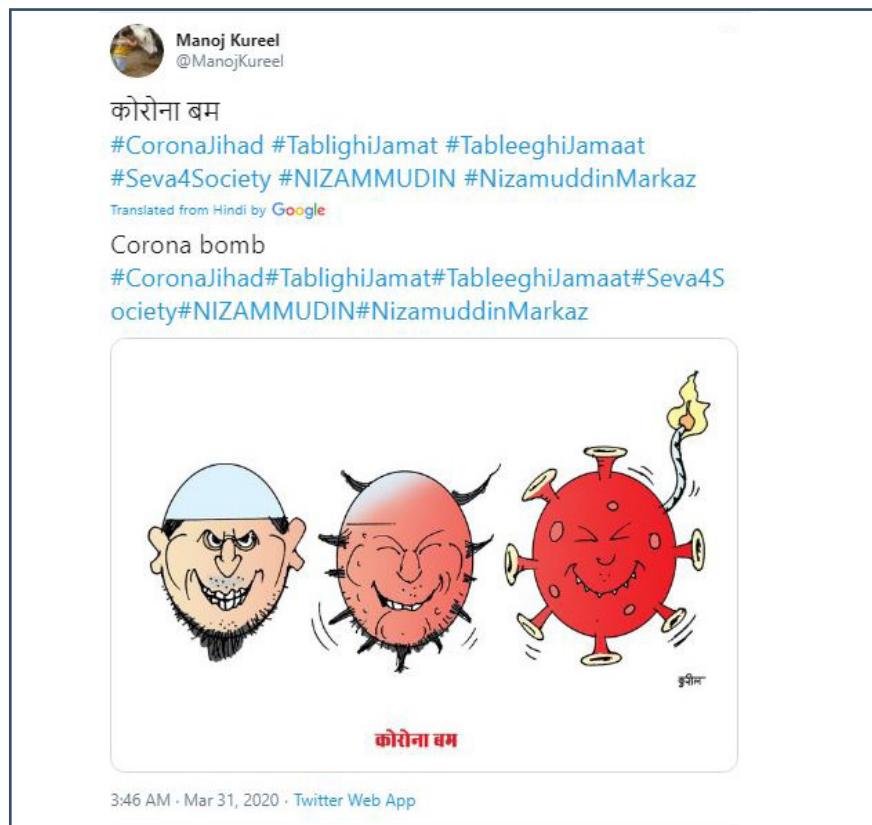
¹ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tablighi-jamaat-and-covid-19-the-story-so-far/article31225065.ece>

a pandemic. That said the gathering complied with all Indian government health regulations and policies at the time.

Dr Zafarul-Islam Khan, chairman of the Delhi Minorities Commission, noted that although Tablighi Jamaat had been shortsighted in holding the convention, there were “dozens of examples of governments, political parties and other religious groups who also flouted the coronavirus restrictions and gathered in large numbers.” At the same time of the Tablighi Jamaat gathering, millions of Hindus also congregated for religious ceremonies, with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath convening temple runs hours after the Prime Minister declared the first lockdown on March 25, 2020. Despite the frequency of national gatherings across faiths,² national media outlets, political and local actors specifically targeted only Muslims in India. Khan added that “the whole focus is being directed only on Muslims. In the past few days, we have noted a new wave of attacks on Muslims across the country. There is talk of social boycott of Muslims, harassment of Muslims by Hindutva groups and Muslims are even being harassed by police in various areas.”

#Coronajihad went viral as increasingly dangerous conspiracy narratives trended on Twitter and Facebook. Posts equated Muslims with the virus, labeled them bioterrorists, and called for economic as well as social boycotts. Despite the efforts of multiple fact-checking institutions to debunk Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation, nothing substantial was done on either Facebook or Twitter.

These inflammatory hashtags normalize the stigmatization of minorities, particularly as many major media outlets, like ANI, Zee News, and Republic TV, have amplified and mischaracterized polarizing claims as unequivocal facts.



Far-right Hindu Nationalist social media users weaponized the Tabiligi Jamaat gathering to

² <https://www.newslandry.com/2020/04/27/audit-of-bigotry-how-indian-media-vilified-tablighi-jamaat-over-coronavirus-outbreak>

demonize millions of India's Muslim minority community members, prompting many upper caste Indians to demand "shoot-on-sight" orders and call for healthcare to be denied to those infected by the virus³. The intense discrimination against Indian Muslims drove a Muslim man in Himachal Pradesh to suicide after being bullied by community members, despite his having tested negative for COVID-19. The devastating reality is that COVID-19 does not and will not distinguish among people on the basis of faith, caste, race, or place. Muslims who are infected are victims of the illness, and deserve the same care and support as all who contract this disease.

This hyper focus on religion, and specifically Muslim gatherings, shifted the focus away from other likely transmission sites. This not only has detrimental consequences for a vulnerable minority community, but also risks the overall public's health.

This pandemic requires national -- and even global -- unity. Public health requires us to build national trust so the public can feel comfortable with government-issued recommendations. Using the pandemic to justify hate-based politics will not solve it; only scientific rigor and global cooperation will turn the tide of this deadly disease. That is why we must do better. Disinformation and hate speech render us all vulnerable, multiplying the pain of this pandemic.

That is why we must do better.

The pandemic is occurring against the backdrop of India's frightening turn towards genocide⁴ in the light of the Citizenship Amendment Act and implementation of the National Registry of Citizens. In January 2020, the Indian Parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which lays the legal foundation for denationalizing Muslims and targeting other minorities. After months of protest, in February, while U.S. President Trump was visiting India, New Delhi experienced a horrific pogrom that killed over 50 people (the majority of whom were Muslim) and left thousands homeless and unemployed, compounding their vulnerability to the global pandemic. Time and again we have seen that hate speech is the harbinger of atrocity, which is why we need to act immediately to prevent a larger loss of life.

The problem extends beyond India. Hate speech originating in India has global consequences given that India is the largest market on Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram and Youtube as well as a growing market for Twitter. This market dominance means that Indian disinformation networks can quickly disseminate disinformation into global discourse.

Because Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation has not been addressed by these platforms, we now see global attacks against Muslims and global Islamophobic actors mobilizing around this bigotry. This includes notorious Islamophobes and racists like Pamela Gellar,⁵ Amy Mek,⁶ Jihad Watch,⁷ Neal Boortz,⁸ Andy Ngo,⁹ Katie Hopkins,¹⁰ Maria Wirth,¹¹ and Tommy Robinson.¹²

In the United Kingdom, the independent monitoring group Tell Mama,¹³ which documents

3 <https://thewire.in/communalism/rajasthan-muslim-woman-baby-dies-doctor>

4 <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2020/01/07/India-2020-Those-Who-Own-The-Past-Own-The-Future>

5 <https://archive.vn/37oyC>

6 <https://archive.vn/LpYlq>

7 <https://archive.ph/vQoxd>

8

9 <http://archive.ph/ZC6lt>

10 <https://twitter.com/KTHopkins/status/1243625444139769858>

11 <https://archive.ph/3uXaq>

12

13 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/05/police-investigate-uk-far-right-groups-over-anti-muslim-coronavirus-claims#img-1>

Islamophobic hate crimes in Europe, has reported a spike in anti-Muslim hate online. False or misleading claims about Muslims congregating and ignoring government mandates to shelter in place have been weaponized by far-right Hindu Nationalists and white supremacists alike.

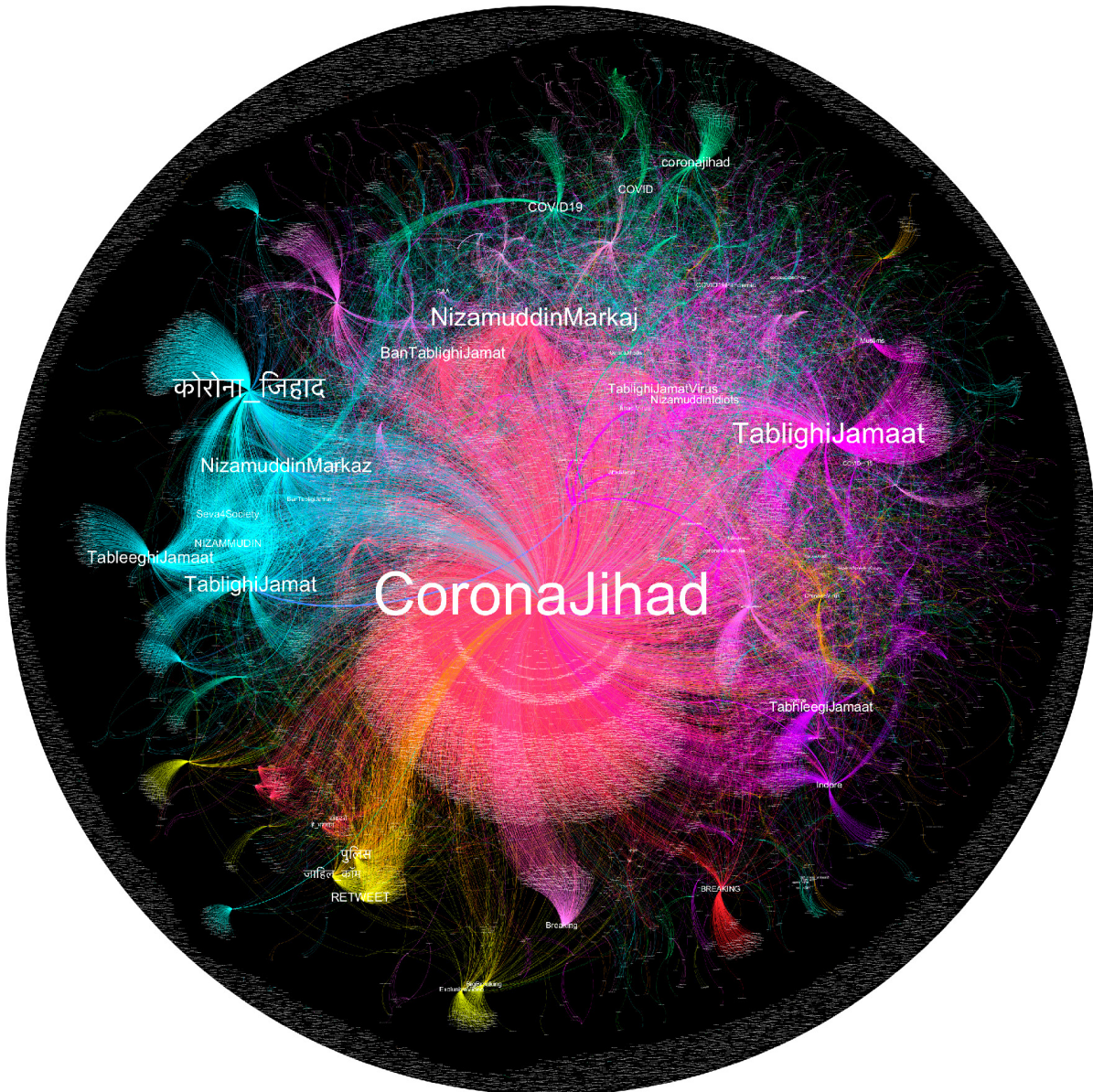


The threat of anti-Muslim hate crimes is very real in Europe and the United States. With Muslims representing nearly 24.1% of the world's population (1.8 billion people as of 2015), we cannot allow the normalization of dangerous speech against them or any other community. Disinformation and hate speech render us all vulnerable, multiplying the pain of this pandemic.

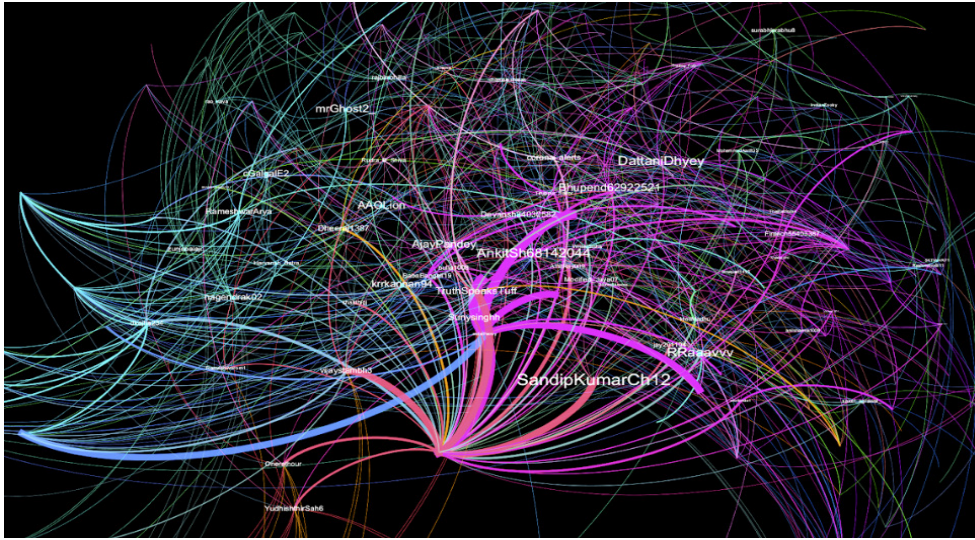
The ***Equality Labs Disinformation Team*** has been monitoring the progress of this disinformation trend. Below is a summary of our observations related to the rise of #CoronaJihad and other hashtags. This report aims to inform corporate, state and civil society actors plus prompt urgent action to address this violence.

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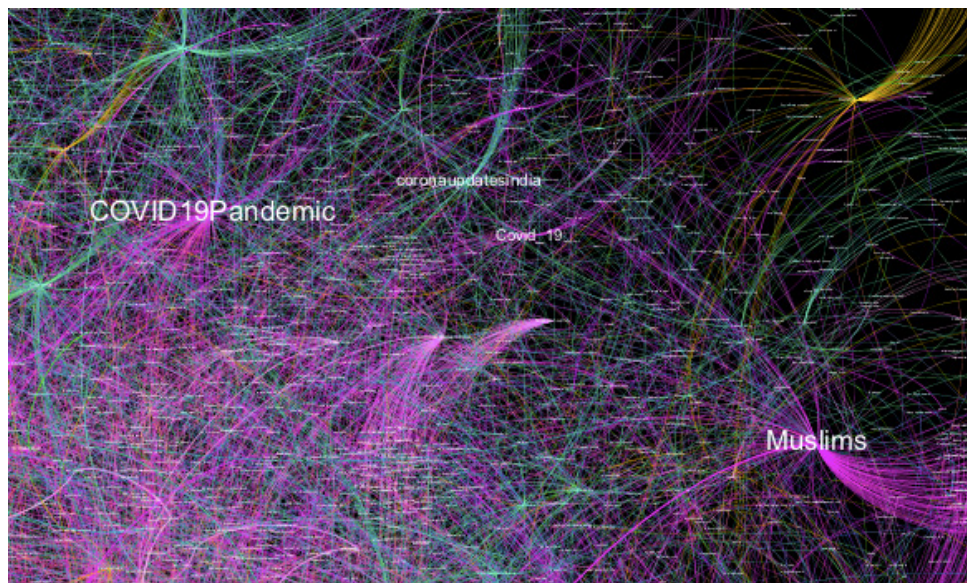
12



Using the social media analysis and research tool Talkwalker, we were able to determine the reach of the #Coronajihad hashtag on Twitter during the period of March 31 - April 6, 2020. Focusing on this period of peak virality, we derive and analyze geographic scope, demographics, and other reach based factors.



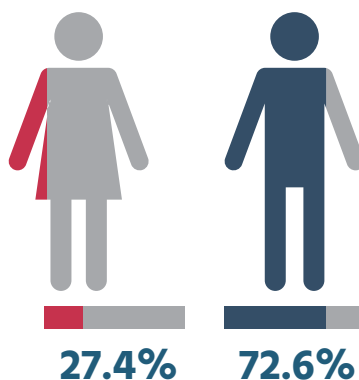
The network map relates the most frequently occurring, hate-based content as well as the Twitter users behind it using nodes and links. Visualizing windows of data across time in this way helps to understand the exponential rate that unmoderated hate speech can spread and amplify through social media platforms.



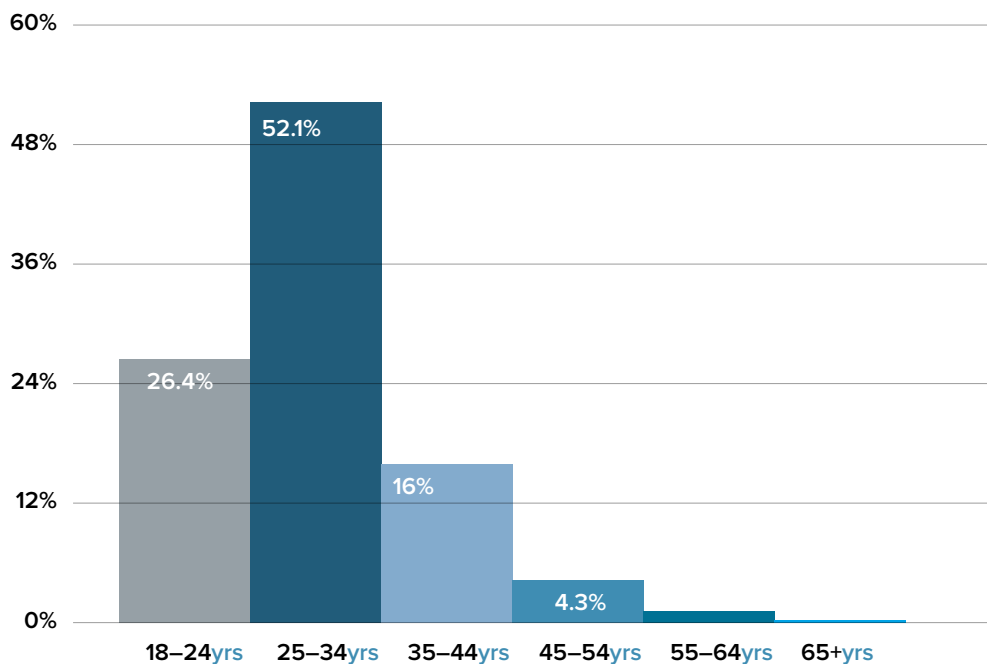
DEMOGRAPHICS OF #CORONAJIHAD

Using tools via Talkwalker, we were able to analyze users of the #Coronajihad hashtag. This provided unique insight into the demographic breakdown of the Hindu Nationalist movement involved in that campaign. Our research that follows reveals that nearly 3 out of every 4 users responsible for #Coronajihad were males between the ages of 18 and 34, posting equally in Hindi and English, and with backgrounds in engineering, writing, higher education, and entrepreneurship.

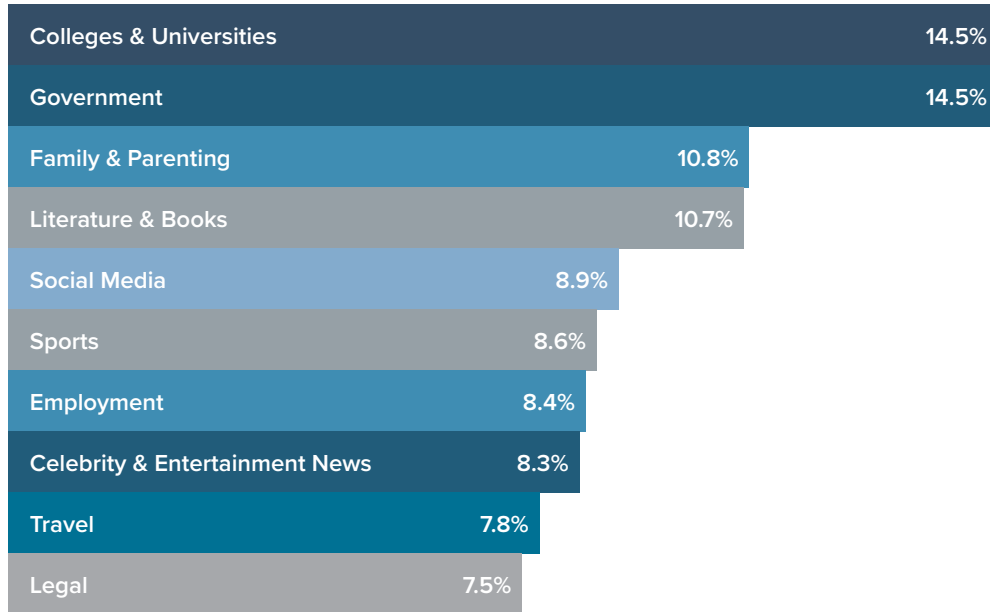
Gender



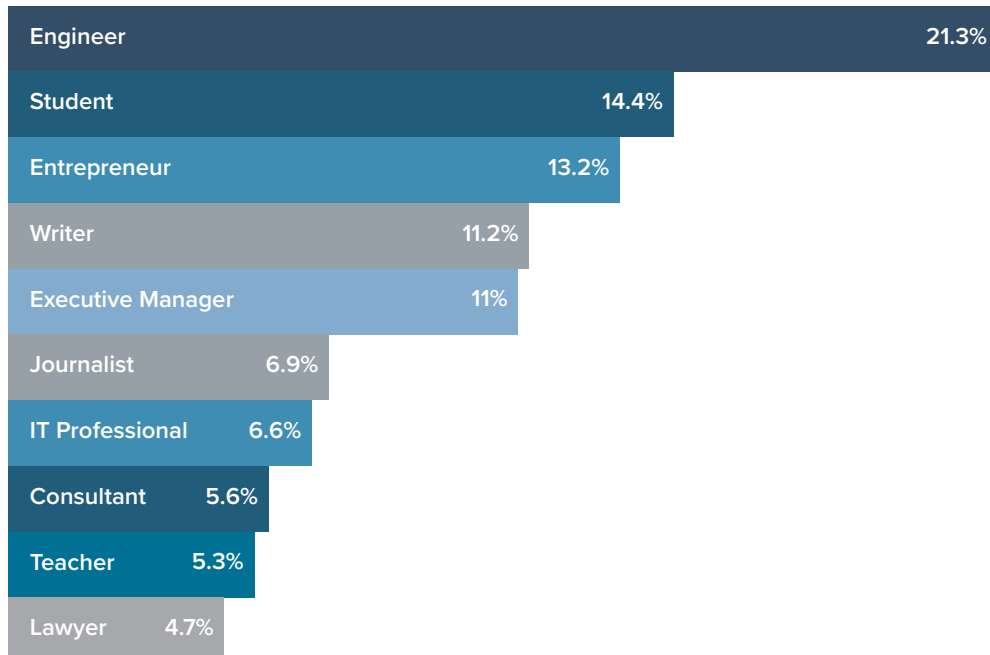
Age



User Interests

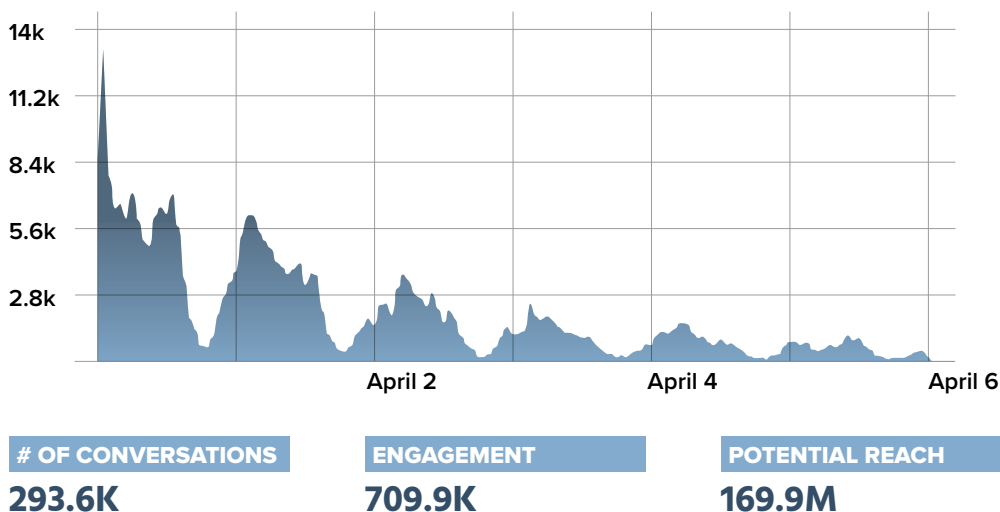


User Occupations

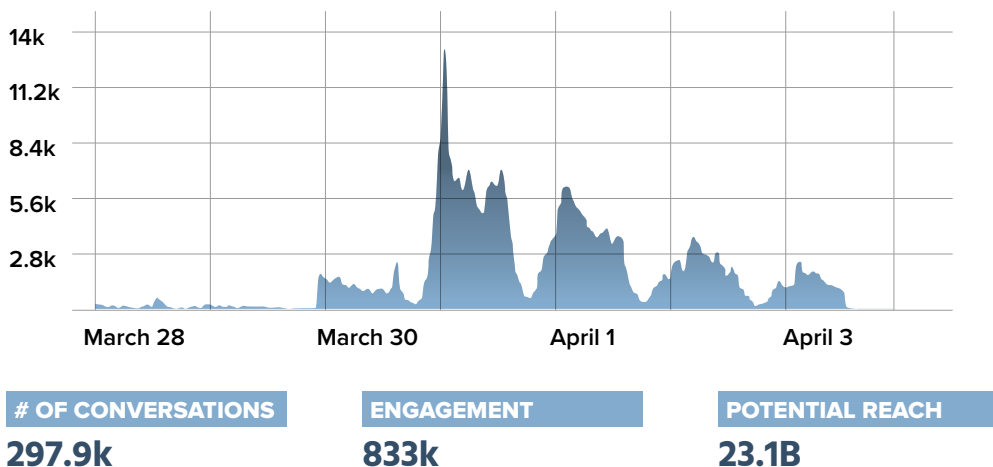


REACH OF #CORONAJIHAD

During this period there were over 293,000 conversations on Twitter with over 700,000 points of engagement. For purposes of this research, engagement starts with the number of users who have interacted with the content, including likes, clicks, shares, comments and mentions,¹⁴ while conversations map the rate of comments per post, in relation to the number of followers, to identify conversations that originate from this hashtag.¹⁵ Ultimately, #Coronajihad Islamophobic content reached 170 million users across Twitter, as demonstrated by the potential reach metric calculated by taking the **total number of mentions x followers of accounts**.



#Coronajihad Conversations on All Platforms



All mainstream media outlets as well as all other social media platforms, excluding Facebook.

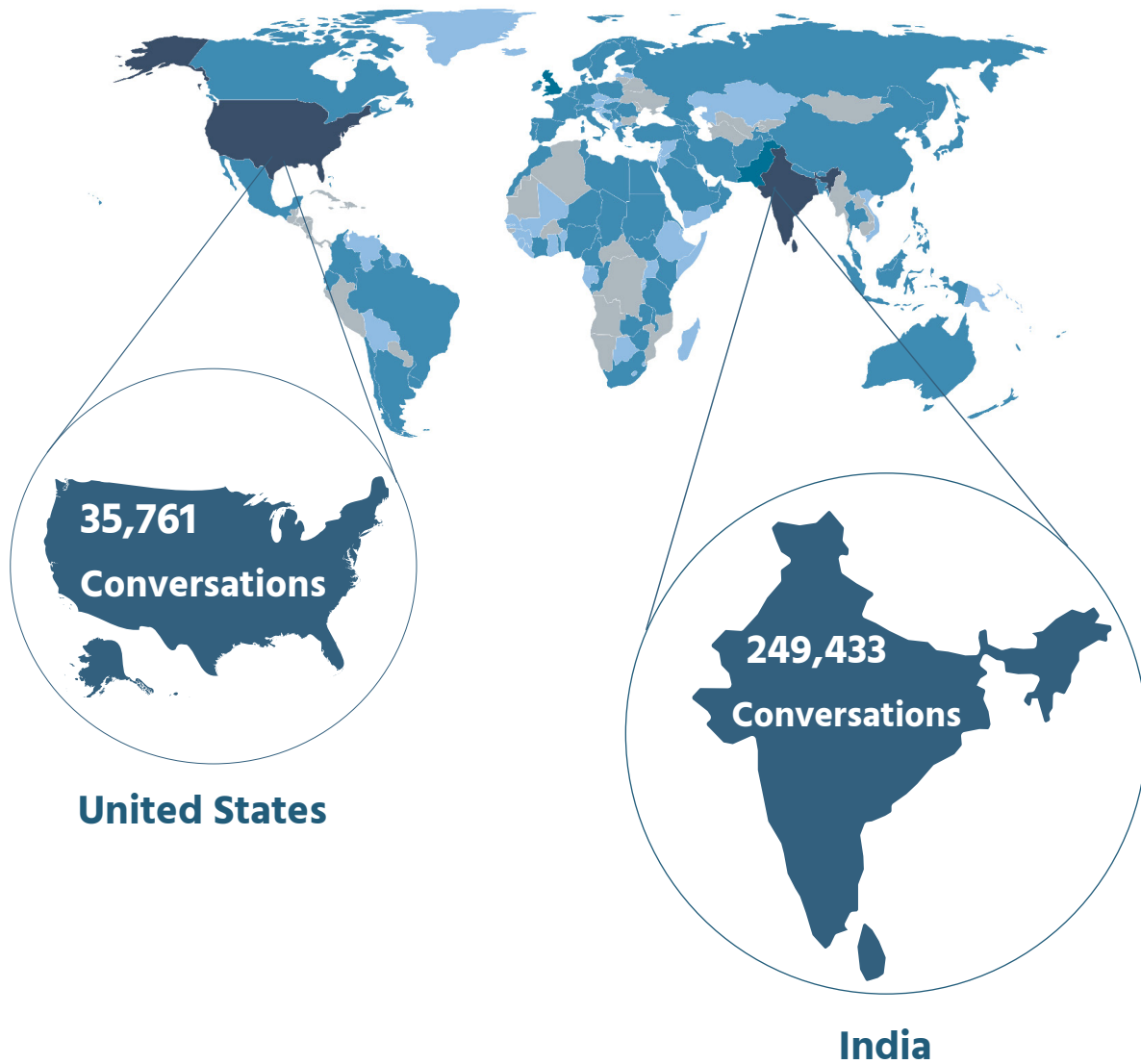
¹⁴ <https://www.talkwalker.com/blog/social-media-metrics>

¹⁵ <https://www.talkwalker.com/blog/social-media-metrics>

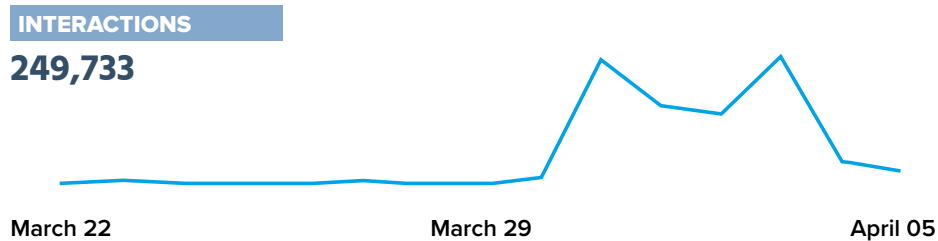
GEOGRAPHIC REACH OF #CORONAJIHAD

One of the other critical findings of the social media analysis is the geographic spread of people propagating the hashtag. The accounts driving this conversation are based predominantly in India and the U.S., revealing that there are major Hindu Nationalist networks active beyond the Indian subcontinent.

Top Countries Driving #Coronajihad

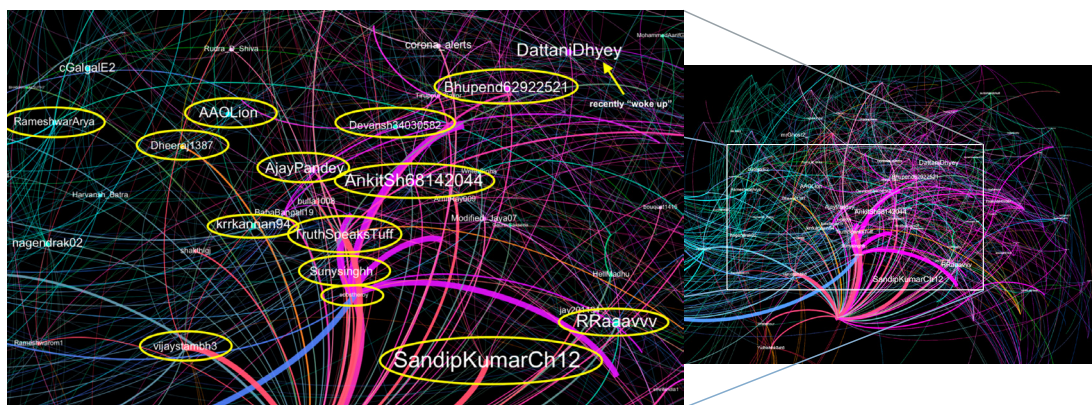


Crowdtangle sourced data shows interactions with #Coronajihad on Facebook. As can be seen, those hashtags had a parallel spike during the same time period. Clearly, content on social media can not only incite hate online, but also provoke hateful conversations—and even actions—outside the platform.



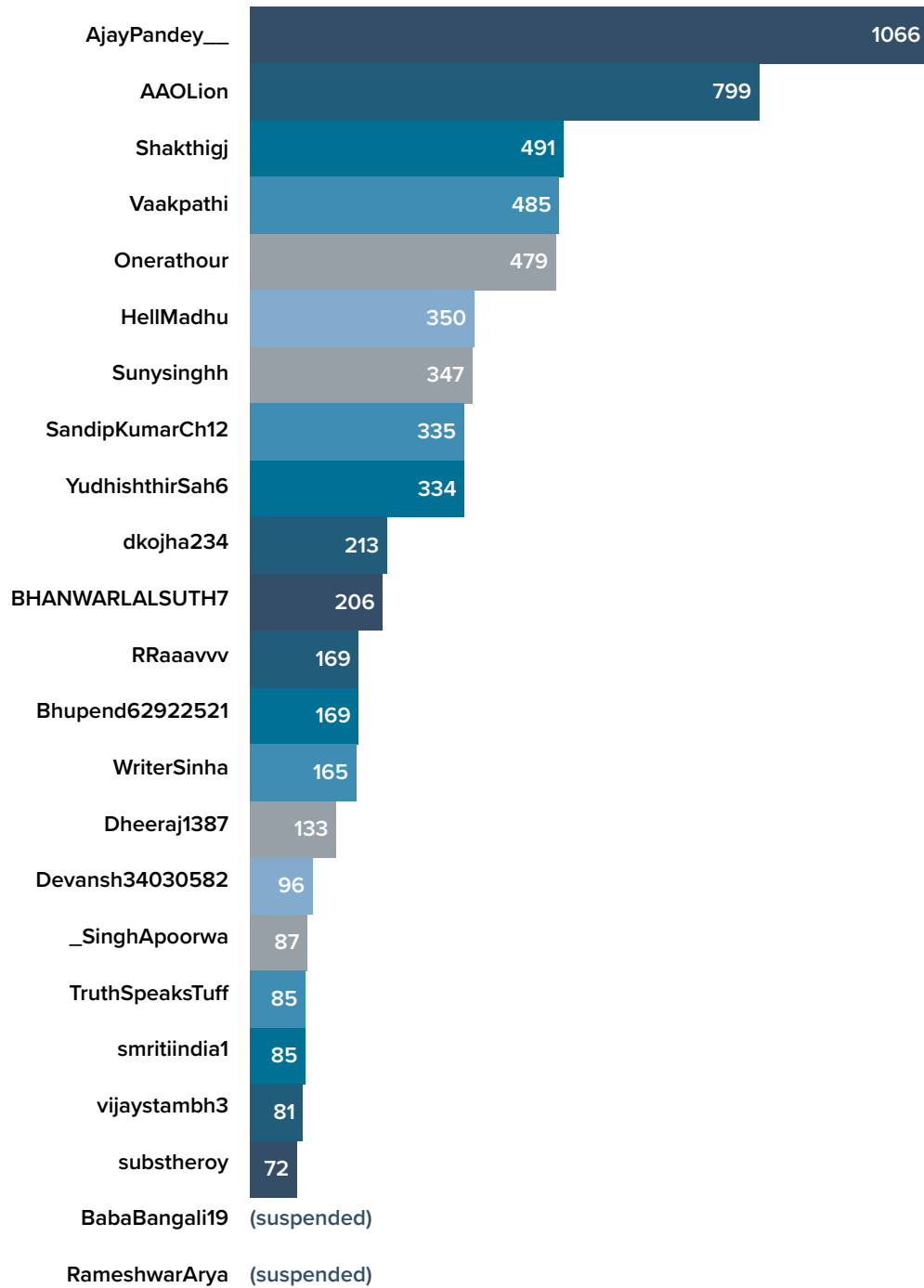
HIGH VOLUME USERS

Drilling down into the network map reveals high volume users who are circled and analyzed for tweet frequency.



Users encircled above are represented in the following graph of high frequency tweeters.

Highest Frequency #Coronajihad Tweeters / Users



Regardless of whether these accounts are driven by software or human behavior, the cumulative impact of multiple accounts pushing out over 250 tweets a day coupled with the sheer large number of accounts pushing out #coronajihad content is profound, and points to the problem of “censorship by noise.” This occurs when the sheer volume of content being pumped out by actors furthering a particular narrative dominates users’ timelines and worldviews to the extent that no meaningful, competing narrative can break through algorithmic parameters to offer a different--and in this case, less hate-driven and violent--view.

We recommend Twitter investigate these handles for more insight into how these users are manipulating the algorithm through human or potential bot behavior, rather than relying on one-off takedowns of “bad actors” if this problem is to be realistically addressed. Additionally we encourage Facebook to allow great access to its API so that independent research can assist in finding similar patterns of coordinated activity. While it is true that individual bad actor accounts may participate in censorship by noise, the larger phenomenon is only possible due to growth-driven underlying code that is baked into the platforms themselves.

ORIGINS

Islamophobic and caste oppressive content has been endemic to both Facebook and Twitter for many years. Thus, #Coronajihad is part of an ongoing, aggressive campaign of demonizing Muslims and minority groups in South Asia. #Coronajihad was initially pushed explicitly by India’s Hindu Nationalists, so its digital footprint allows us to observe what happens when a global pandemic meets vitriolic hate.

Such content, a hallmark of perpetrators of Hindu Nationalist hate speech, has increased in the wake of protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), in which millions of caste oppressed and Muslim communities decried India’s turn toward genocide.

India’s [Citizenship Amendment Act](#) (CAA) created an unconstitutional religious criteria for Indian citizenship. In combination with the National Registry of Citizens (NRC) and the National Population Register (NPR), the CAA lays the legal foundation for denaturalizing millions of Indian minorities. International bodies like the UNHRC¹⁶ have described the CAA as “fundamentally discriminatory,” with Jeremy Laurence, a spokesperson for UN Human Rights chief Michele Bachelet, stating, “The amended law would appear to undermine the commitment to equality before the law enshrined in India’s Constitution and India’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, of which India is a State party, which prohibits discrimination based on racial, ethnic or religious grounds.” The US Commission on International Religious Freedom lists India as a country of particular concern.¹⁷ Along with Genocide Watch, the Commission issued a new genocide alert for India.¹⁸

After the CAA was passed on December 11, 2019, open bigotry ran rampant through social media. Because Facebook and Twitter had taken no action to stop years of previous casteist and Islamophobic hate speech, Hindu nationalist networks had normalized extremist and illegal hate speech. Such negligence gave licence to Hindu Nationalists who knew there would be little enforcement against their activities, in essence giving them full reign to target minorities,

16 <https://www.thestatesman.com/world/un-chief-concerned-violence-use-excessive-force-caa-protests-1502834872.html>

17 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2020/04/28/india-receives-low-rating-us-government-watchdog-religious-freedom/>

18 <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2020/01/07/India-2020-Those-Who-Own-The-Past-Own-The-Future>

despite the fact that these attacks violated the community standards of both companies.

Many of the accounts disseminating this content are verified by popular social media platforms and have large followings. This creates another layer of structural bias, as both Muslim and caste oppressed communities have repeatedly protested and complained about the unfair verification system. This led to hashtags like #Cancelallblueticks, as frustrated Dalits and members of other minorities challenged the platforms for access.¹⁹ Verification bias is crucial in hate speech and disinformation, as a blue verification badge can lend a violent perpetrator credibility.

This political context is then crucial in understanding how India became such a fertile ground for Islamophobic hate speech and disinformation. It is also important to note that Indian democracy was already in crisis before the pandemic.

The latest manifestation of this crisis took place on February 23, 2020, when there was a pogrom²⁰ in Delhi that targeted Indian Muslims neighborhoods and shops. The calls for violence went viral on both Facebook and Twitter, with the Delhi High Court requesting the police to examine videos of recent speeches by BJP leaders Anurag Thakur, Kapil Mishra and Parvesh Verma to determine the potential for disruption. Supreme Court Judge Muralidhar, one of the judges who issued this request, anguished over the delay in police action. He noted, “When is the appropriate stage? When the city has burnt down? What are you waiting for? How many lives have to be lost?”²¹

These same questions should also be asked of popular social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, as the videos cited by this judicial order remained on the platform despite being flagged as content that could lead to imminent harm. Tragically, nothing was done. The failure to act by both platforms and the police led to the Delhi pogrom, resulting in 53 deaths, over 200 injuries, and 2,000 arrests.

One needs to ask these tough yet pertinent questions of Jack Dorsey and Mark Zuckerberg. Why is such vitriolic content not only hosted by, but also allowed to remain on these platforms despite multiple reports, complaints and even a judicial order?

19 <https://www.livemint.com/technology/tech-news/twitter-faces-casteism-row-as-cancel-all-blue-ticks-in-india-campaign-trends-11573032853234.html>

20 <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/02/what-happened-delhi-was-pogrom/607198/>

21 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/delhi-hc-directs-police-to-register-fir-against-kapil-mishra-and-others-for-inflammatory-speeches/articleshow/74318760.cms?from=mdr>

Below is a table that displays in detail the progression of the hashtags that birthed #Coronajihad. Reviewing this series reveals how relentlessly Islamophobia was spread from the passage of the #CAA to the rise of COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation. Facebook and Twitter have been dangerously negligent in allowing genocidal calls for violence and boycotts to remain on their platforms for months.

We have to ask what happened to cause this gross failure in moderation, given the violent consequences.

TABLE OF ISLAMOPHOBIC HASHTAGS December 2019 to April 2020

DATE	HASHTAG	COMMENTS
12/11/2019	N/A	<i>CAA is passed, paving the way for an alarming rise in hate speech online directed against Muslims and caste-oppressed minority communities.</i>
12/23/2019	#CAA2019 #CAA	The CAA protests begin and Hindu Nationalists flood social media with pro-CAA and anti-protest hashtags.
12/28/2019	#Virathu	This chilling hashtag references the Myanmar monk Ashin Wirathu, who led the genocide against Rohingya Muslims. He is lauded by Hindu Nationalists using the deliberately misspelled #Virathu so that posts celebrating him and his policies of genocide avoid detection by the AI hate speech algorithms. The posts appearing at this time celebrated his policy of boycott and genocide. His infamous, genocidal statement “You cannot sleep with a Mad dog” is a call to action against Muslims protesting the CAA.
1/22/2020	#cannibal #Rohingya #jihadi #parasite #Bangladeshi #NRC_विरोधी_घुसपैठियों_के_समर्थक_हैं #nrc_caa_npr_protest #ShaheenBaghProtest	The Shaheen Bagh protests, an inspirational, intergenerational gathering of Muslim women resisting the CAA, are equated with the islamophobic and genocidal dog whistle of Rohingya #Parasite #Bangladeshi.
1/29/2020	#ShaheenBaghTerror #ShaheenBaghProtest #ProPakShaheenBagh	Shaheen Bagh protesters are equated with terrorists and Pakistanis using the term jihadi as a slur, comparing civil protests to acts of terrorism.
2/7/2020	#ShaheenBaghjihadi #ShaheenBaghProtests #IslamicTerrorism #IslamicStateOfShaheenBagh	
2/9/2020	#BoycottMuslimShops	Calls for economic and social boycotts of Muslims begin to pick up steam.

2/22/2020	#DelhiBurning	Delhi pogroms begin: Muslim neighborhoods and sites of protests become targets of Hindu Nationalist mobs.
2/24/2020	#DelhiBurning #DelhiPolice #DelhiRiots #AmitShahResign	Hindu Nationalists begin to blame Muslims for the pogroms, although Muslims are the most affected community.
2/24/2020	#DelhiBurning #DelhiRiots #DelhiCAAClashes #DelhiViolence	These hashtags try to establish a false narrative that the planned pogrom against Muslims were “clashes” or “riots.”
2/24/2020	#IslamicJihad #DelhiRiots #DelhiPolice #DelhiBurning #Shahrukh	The intense focus on a Muslim shooter attempts to distract from the larger issues of violence against Muslims.
2/24/2020	#IslamicTerrorism	The idea of Islamic terror is discussed as the animating idea of the pogrom.
2/24/2020	#IStandWithKapilMishra #HarHinduKapilMishra #ISupportKapilMishra	These hashtags defend Kapil Mishra, who called for the riots, in response to calls for his arrest.
2/25/2020	#IslamicJihad #Radical_Islamic_Terrorism #DelhiPolice	Muslims who are protesting are again likened to terrorists.
2/26/2020	#ArrestSwaraBhasker #ArrestTahirHussain #Arrest_Rj_Sayema #ArrestRanaAyubb #ArrestSoniaGandhi with Kapil Mishra for provoking people in Delhi for riots. They all are equally culprit for #DelhiRiots2020. #DangeKaSachOnZee #delhivoilence #boycottthappad #AnkitSharma #Delhigenocide	Hindu Nationalists use this series of hashtags to name numerous influencers, including journalists, opposition party figures and even student activists, to distract from calls to arrest Kapil Mishra.
2/27/2020	#SaveDelhiHindus	Hindu Nationalists attempt to argue that Hindus are the primary victims of a Muslim pogrom.
2/29/2020	#DelhiAgainstJehadiViolence	This hashtag continues the gaslighting by arguing that Delhi must be defended from jehadi violence, which in this case means protesters against the CAA. These protesters are being equated with “jehadi” terrorists. The hashtags are also accompanied by amplifying protests across India.
2/29/2020	#BanTheBook #DelhiAgainstJehadiViolence #DelhiGenocide2020	Additional hashtags call for the banning of the Qu’ran, the Muslim holy book, and insist that the Delhi pogrom against Muslims was an act of genocide against Hindus.
3/1/2020	#BanTheBook #Quranovirus	This is one of the first instances of linking Coronavirus with the portmanteau Quaronavirus.

3/4/2020	#WomenofShaheenBagh #BigBreaking #CoronavirusReachesDelhi	Shaheen Bagh is linked to Coronavirus.
3/5/2020	#GenocideOfHindus #BoycottHalal #coronavirusinindia	The call to boycott Muslim shops (the obvious target here being Halal meat shops) is linked to the idea that they spread Coronavirus and so promote the genocide of Hindus.
3/5/2020	#ShaheenBaghEmpty	There is now a continued and aggressive push to empty Shaheen Bagh. Such calls are common among Hindu Nationalists eager to quell these peaceful Muslim protests, but with COVID-19, arguments pivot to health risks at the protest site and imply that protesters are trying to spread the disease.
3/6/2020	#coronavirus #jihadivirus #MumbaiBagh	Here is the first instance of the slur hashtag Jihadivirus.
3/7/2020	#SHE #SupportHinduEconomy #Virathu #S#SupportHinduEconomy	This is the second major reference to Myanmar's monk and his call to boycott Muslims as well as for Muslim businesses to be marked. Knowing that calls for boycotts can lead to posts being taken down, Hindu Nationalists trend the more deceptive Support Hindu Economy and its acronym, as this appears like a positive, not discriminatory, statement.
3/11/2020	#StopDemographicZehad	Muslims are imagined to be waging religious war on many fronts against Hindus. This series of hashtags focus on Kashmir and other areas of India where there is a false narrative that Muslims are trying to push Hindus out of power through overpopulation.
3/11/2020	#ZameenJihad	Zee News Editor in Chief Sudhir Chaudhary talks about "Zameen Jihad," or land jihd, and deepens this idea of the many jihads against Hindus. Zameen, or land jihad, is an extension of the ongoing jihad memes.
3/14/2020	#Coronavirus #islamic_radical_terrorism #CoronaVirusUpdates #CoronaOutbreak #GodMorningSaturday #NationalEmergency #COVID #Islamic_Jihad #Delhigenocide	Muslims, jihad and COVID-19 continue to be connected.
3/14/2020	#HinduEconomicRights	Boycotts against Muslims are pushed while content is shared depicting Muslims as unclean, their restaurants and stores sites of disease.

3/15/2020	#EveryMuslimIsAJihadi	Muslim people are branded as Jihadis.
3/16/2020	#ShaheenBaghDoesntCare	More attacks are leveled against Shaheen Bagh. The activists desperately protesting even during the beginning of a pandemic are depicted as reckless in the face of Coronavirus.
3/17/2020	#ShaheenBaghHealthRisk	Shaheen Bagh is now branded a health risk.
3/18/2020	#coronavirus #HIV #EbolaVirus #JihadiVirus #CKMKB	This is a continued attempt to trend Jihadivirus.
3/18/2020	#OurHealthVsShaheenBagh	Shaheen Bagh is portrayed as a threat to Indian public health.
3/18/2020	#ShaheenBagh #ShaheenBaghCoronaThreat	Here Shaheen Bagh and Coronavirus are seen as one threat.
3/20/2020	#JantaCurfewVsShaheenBagh	The national curfew is now seen as being at odds with Shaheen Bagh.
3/21/2020	#BoycottCoronomics	The call to boycott Muslims, claimed to be sources of this disease, again returns with force.
3/21/2020	#MUSLIMDISTANCING	Now there is a call for Muslim distancing, which equates social distancing to also keeping distance from Muslims.
3/23/2020	#TheForesightednessOfSaints	Hindu Nationalists laud Wirathu as a saint, and his policies of genocide are seen as prescient in the face of Muslims and COVID-19.
3/27/2020	#AntiCAA_ProCorona	This hashtag claims CAA protesters are being pro-COVID-19.
3/29/2020	#CoronaJihad	The introduction of Coronajihad
3/30/2020	#Coronajihad #Nizamuddin #TablighiJammat	#Coronajihad is linked to the gathering of the Muslim missionary event of the Tablighi Jamaat. The coverage in ANI news amplified the hashtag suggesting this Muslim Event was a super spreader event. The coverage and social media focused only on this gathering despite many sites being open, further cementing the ideas of #Coronajihad.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Once the #Coronajihad hashtag was unleashed, an entire barrage of Islamophobic content followed. This has led to an increase in Islamophobic attacks against Muslims across the world. The digital sphere is one of the main ecosystems of anti-Muslim hate, where powerful political actors, organizational leaders and fringe groups share disinformation, launch doxxing attacks and promote toxic content that excludes and marginalizes Muslims. These hashtags do not stand alone; there are thousands of hashtags and political discourses online targeting Muslims. Some examples are #MuslimMeaningTerrorist, #BioJihad and #HowAMuslim, all of which have been deployed to bring together far right actors seeking to advance their Islamophobic agenda.

The linking of COVID-19 to Muslims has inspired an entire visual vocabulary that links the virus to images of terrorism. These accusations include bomb threats, doctored images of Muslim people sneezing on food and spitting on people, falsified videos of Muslims rubbing their snot and bodily fluids on surfaces, public footage of sneering men and political cartoons of suicide bombers targeting hospitals and local health centers with the virus. These images, although largely debunked by experts, have been amplified by popular news outlets, either through ignorance or in deliberate complicity with a Hindu nationalist, majoritarian discourse. International news often dangerously co-signs the messaging of right wing Hindu Nationalists.

Below is a wordcloud of the associated hashtags that often accompany #Coronajihad. The overwhelming idea across thousands of tweets, WhatsApp messages, Facebook posts and Instagrams is that Muslims intended to weaponize the virus to terrorize the Indian population. These hashtags relate to other inflammatory content such as #BiologicalJihad, #MuslimVirus, #MuslimDistancing, #Jihadivirus and worse.



Delving deeper into the visuals of this hashtag and other Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation is harrowing, but necessary. Below we explore a sampling of the disturbing memes going viral. Many of these posts were repeatedly reported by Muslims and caste-oppressed minorities, yet little was done to prevent these posts not only from going up, but also spreading. Posts starting on one platform would quickly spread to another, generating never-ending cycles of violence as a result.

CONTENT EXAMPLES



The cartoon here shows a suicide bomber, dressed like a Muslim representing a member of the Tablighi Jamaat or the religious congregation at Nizamuddin in New Delhi. One of the bombs he is set to diffuse is named “Corona Bomb.”



This horrifying image takes the exaggerated stereotype of the Muslim and his octopus-like beard gripping India and spreading the virus. The heading reads: “Tablighi Jamaat doubles corona.” The cryptic code COVID 786 equates Muslims with COVID-19. This is derived from religious significance of 786 in the Muslim faith where it is the sum of the Arabic letters of the opening phrase of the Quran “Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim” (In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Beneficent). Hindu Nationalists use this number as code for slurs to evade detection by AI moderation algorithms.



Abhishek mishra
@Abhishek_6333

अब दुनिया की सभी सरकारों को समझ लेना चाहिए कि मुस्लिम कौम किसी भी देश के सिस्टम के साथ सहयोग नहीं कर सकते। आप उनको चाहे कितना भी सम्मान या सुविधाये दे दो। शायद अब समय आ गया है पूरी दुनिया को सोचना होगा कि इस्लामिक सोच से विश्व को कैसे बचाया जाए।

[#मस्जिदों_में_सरकारी_ताले_लगाओ](#)

Translated from Hindi by Google

Now all governments of the world should understand that Muslim communities cannot cooperate with the system of any country. No matter how much you give them respect or facilities.

Perhaps the time has come for the whole world to think how to save the world from Islamic thinking.

[#मस्जिदों_में_सरकारी_ताले_लगाओ](#)



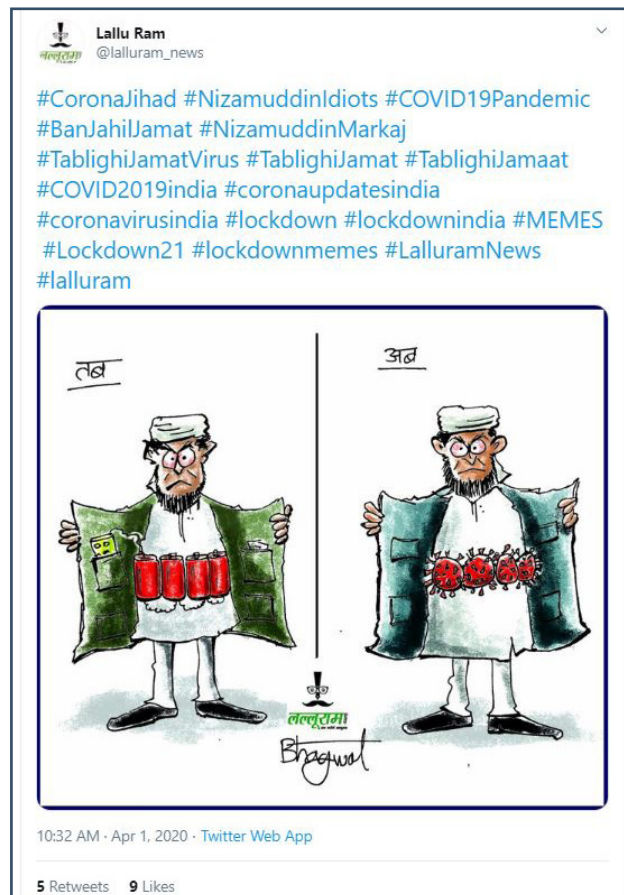
2:58 PM · Mar 31, 2020 · Twitter for Android

74 Retweets 106 Likes

This image portrays Muslims as pushing India to the edge and taking the country away from all other faiths. Hindus who practice secular politics are like ostriches, head in the sand, while they lose their country to this terrorist. The idea that Muslims follow many different paths to jihadi conquest is illustrated by the various figures who are there to speak to Media jihad, population jihad, land jihad, love jihad, and of course coronajihad. The text accompanying this image ominously argues for the world to reconsider Islamic thinking.



A man from the Jamaat is shown to be spreading Corona. The bottle in his hand reads “Corona Jihad,” and he is blowing bubbles that formally link Muslim caricatures with the virus.



This cartoon on the left says “then,” on the right “now,” implying that earlier Muslim suicide bombers used bombs to kill people and now Muslim terrorists deploy COVID-19.



Ach. Ankur Arya
@AchAnkurArya

अगर आपका कोई रिश्तेदार भी इन टोपी वालो से सामान खरीदता है, या मिलता जुलता है तो तुरंत अभी इसी वक्त उस रिश्तेदार का भी बहिष्कार कर दीजिए।

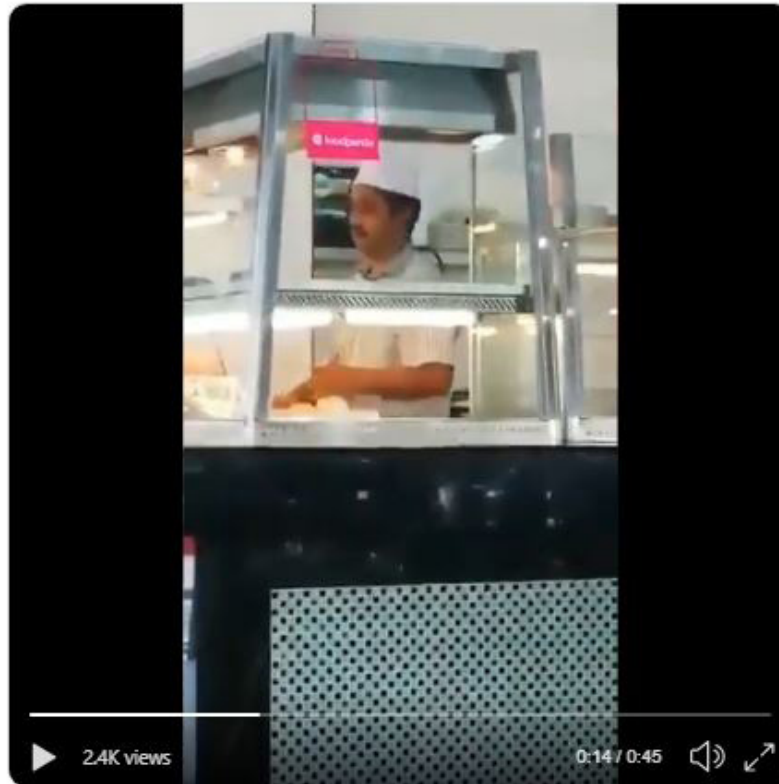
आपका यही झोलमोल वाला रवैया आपको सपरिवार मृत्यु के उडन खटोले में सवार करवा सकता है [#CoronaChainScare](#)
[#WarAgainstVirus](#) [#Covid_19](#) [#आर्थिक_बहिष्कार](#)

Translated from Hindi by Google

If any of your relatives also purchases goods from these hats, or resembles them, then immediately boycott that relative right now.

This same lukewarm attitude can make you ride in the battle of family death.

[#CoronaChainScare](#)[#WarAgainstVirus](#)[#Covid_19](#)[#आर्थिक_बहिष्कार](#)



7:44 AM · Mar 21, 2020 · [Twitter for Android](#)

487 Retweets 793 Likes



Another important trend on social media from the anti-Citizenship Amendment protest, to the anti-Muslim riots and now during COVID-19 has been increasing calls for the economic boycotting of Muslims. This is one such example. This particular tweet, like many others, goes a step further and quotes Ashin Wirathu, the Buddhist monk, who called for Muslims to be excluded from the economy as the first step towards genocide. This infamous boycott was marked by a sticker for Muslim businesses which this posts is also calling for.



Maria Wirth
@mariawirth1

Social distancing = not touching others unnecessarily.

Remember how Hindus were demonised for having rules whom not to touch?

"Untouchability" was portrayed as much worse than killing millions in the name of Xian & Muslm God by the West.

Now??

[#ChineseVirus](#)

[#CoronaAlert](#)

[#Hindus](#)

7:05 AM · Mar 21, 2020 · [Twitter for Android](#)

1.2K Retweets 3.4K Likes

This is a casteist tweet promoting untouchability by comparing it to social distancing.



Manoj Kureel
@ManojKureel

कोरोना बम

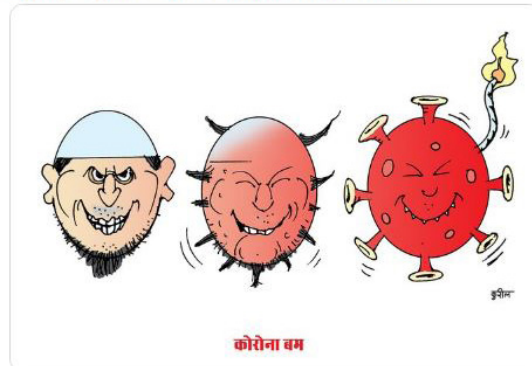
[#CoronaJihad](#) [#TablighiJamat](#) [#TableeghiJamaat](#)

[#Seva4Society](#) [#NIZAMMUDIN](#) [#NizamuddinMarkaz](#)

Translated from Hindi by [Google](#)

Corona bomb

[#CoronaJihad](#)[#TablighiJamat](#)[#TableeghiJamaat](#)[#Seva4Society](#)[#NIZAMMUDIN](#)[#NizamuddinMarkaz](#)



3:46 AM · Mar 31, 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

This cartoon again shows how a Tablighi Jamaat member is turning into a “corona bomb.”

AMPLIFICATION OF ISLAMAPHOBIA BY MEDIA



The stunning rapid-fire distribution of Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation was enabled by a media ecosystem in India that saw news organizations abandoning the norms of unbiased reporting to embrace vitriolic Islamophobia in their coverage. Our analysis found that all of the top ten major national media outlets targeted Muslims during the first week of April 2020, in the wake of the hashtag #Coronajihad and the Tablighi Jamaat gathering.²²

There were so many examples of the mainstream media reporting Islamophobic COVID-19 rumors that we could not include all of them in this report. Most significant is that once the hashtag #Coronajihad went viral, it was the Indian mainstream media that gave it life by populating the Indian news cycle with content that could help build that narrative.

If fact-checking organizations like Altnews had not diligently tracked each claim, we would not have a public record of the Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation that appeared at this time.

Such news included segments, like the one below, featuring a video from 2017 that falsely claims an Islamic preacher provoked members of Tablighi Jamaat to "spit".²³

²² <https://theprint.in/opinion/telescope/tablighi-jamaat-brought-out-republic-zee-and-times-now-fangs/393492/>

²³ https://twitter.com/free_thinker/status/1250811503655161859?s=20



Throughout the show, the channel attempt to blame a certain 'maulana' for the spread of coronavirus. Below

In an article published in Hindustan Times on April 2, 2020, Vir Sanghvi, another well-known Indian journalist working in English-language media, described the Tablighi members as having committed “attempted murder,” despite knowing that those affected first by the virus were Muslims who attended the congregation.²⁴ To accuse the Jamaat of “attempted murder” at a time when false narratives and fake news are circulating only legitimizes the violence and online vitrol then unleashed upon the entire community. India’s battle against the deadly disease requires better and more inclusive public health systems in place and national unity instead of bigotry.

News outlets also repeatedly shared repurposed content to fan the flames of worry in the Indian public that Muslim spiritual leaders were deliberately flouting social distancing norms. For example, a News 24 broadcast on April 17, 2020, implied Muslims were still gathering at one of Delhi’s largest mosques for Friday prayers as usual.²⁵

News 24 took down the video after it was pointed out that the footage was over a month old. (It originally aired on March 13, 2020.) In its response, the channel claimed that an “old video was shared by mistake,” assuring its audience that this was “totally unintentional.”As reporting in Altnews demonstrated, however, this same clip also was shared on March 19, 2020, and on April 1, 2020. News 24 misled its audience that worshippers, unfazed by the COVID-19 outbreak, were gathering in large numbers at Delhi’s Jama Masjid, putting themselves and everybody else at risk.



²⁴ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/why-secular-liberals-are-wrong-about-nizamuddin/story-1FuTwxmmVRNnYJOeChBbnI.html>

²⁵ https://www.altnews.in/news24-shares-old-broadcast-of-namaz-at-jama-masjid-multiple-times-to-portray-mass-gathering/?utm_source=website&utm_medium=social-media&utm_campaign=newpost

Zee News and Sudhir Chowdhury

Below is a further exploration of the mainstream amplification of the Islamophobia and its consequences.

In an April 3, 2020, broadcast, Sudhir Chowdhury, editor-in-chief of the popular Hindi channel Zee News, presents a bigoted report with the name #Coronajihad on the title of the YouTube clip. He calls members of the Jamaat anti-nationals and anti-Indian.²⁶ The video, which has close to 200,000 views, iterates false reports²⁷ that members of the Jamaat spit on healthcare workers.



This video follows weeks of Islamophobic reporting by Chowdhury, the most egregious being in March when he used a diagram to classify the alleged ways in which Muslims are “waging jihad” against Hindus.

Chaudhary claimed to distinguish between “hard” and “soft” jihad.²⁸ The first category, he alleged, included “population jihad,” “love jihad” and “land jihad.” “Soft jihad” included “economic jihad,” “history jihad” and “media jihad.”

Chaudhary then went on to focus on “zameen jihad,” or land jihad, claiming, “Some people are playing the trick of capturing the government’s land to change the population in terms of religion.”

He added that “Islamists” are even trying to “change the religion of land, jungles and rivers.”

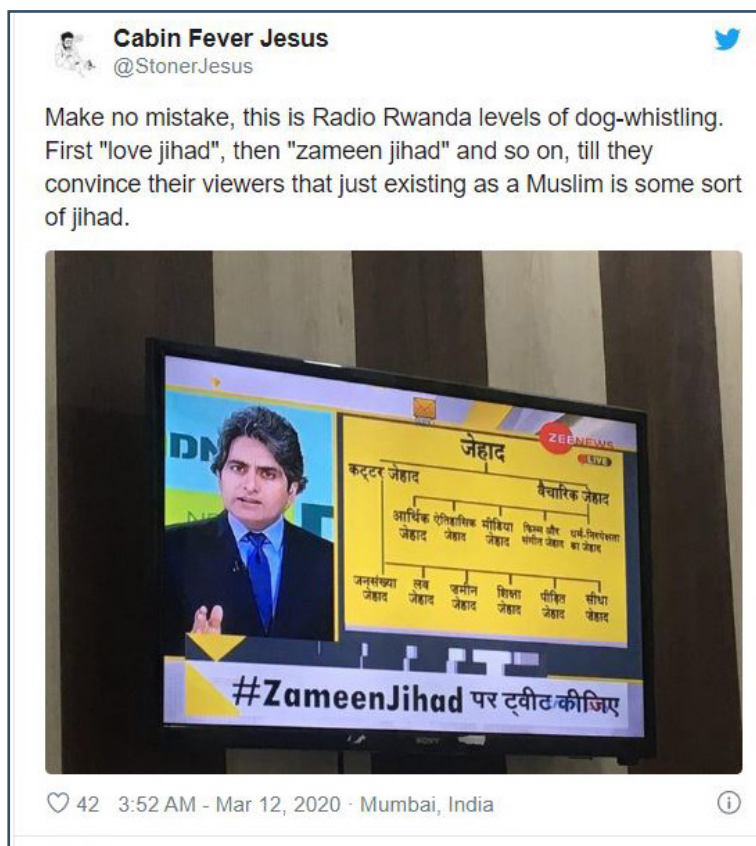
The report was so bigoted that it caused many to note the “Radio Rwanda levels of dog-whistling.”²⁹ This report also went viral on Twitter and Facebook, despite numerous reports to the platform about the dangerous nature of this content. This incident demonstrates how these platforms viciously cross-pollinate and amplify content that can lead to imminent harm.

²⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9wByz5Q33_A

²⁷ <https://www.altnews.in/coronavirus-video-of-an-undertrial-in-mumbai-falsely-viral-as-nizamuddin-markaz-attendee-spitting-at-cop/>

²⁸ <https://scroll.in/article/955940/zee-news-sudhir-chaudhurys-jihad-chart-draws-flak-radio-rwanda-levels-of-dog-whistling>

²⁹ <https://scroll.in/article/955940/zee-news-sudhir-chaudhurys-jihad-chart-draws-flak-radio-rwanda-levels-of-dog-whistling>



Chaudhary altered his bigoted coverage only after the Kerala Police booked him under non-bailable sections for making incendiary remarks about the Muslim community on his show. The lawyer who registered this complaint, Advocate P Gavas, noted, “the programme that this channel telecast is not rooted in a system that we believe in. We acknowledge and believe in the constitutional obligations towards all religions and the secular values of this country. This programme stands in stark contrast to such beliefs. It is against a particular religious community.”

Gavas also spoke to the publication Indian Express over the phone from Kozhikode, where he practices as a lawyer, alleging that Chaudhary targeted the country’s Muslims through his “jihad flow-chart” a bid to raise religious tensions and create fissures among different communities. He pointed to the advisory of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry: Guideline 2 warns against using visuals or words contemptuous of religious groups or which promote communal attitudes.³⁰

In the wake of this charge, Chowdhury has softened his Islamophobia and even did a segment on May 8, 2020, in which he laid out the five pillars of Islam and said jihad stands for a “pious fight.”³¹

This change is notable, as it shows that one small recourse minorities have in the face of such overwhelming hate speech and disinformation is the legal system; legal remedies work with social media platforms.

30 <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/kerala-police-books-zee-news-editor-sudhir-chaudhary-6401670/>

31 https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=hrWBRBKnzIA&feature=emb_title

FACT CHECKING BY POLICE DEPARTMENTS

Fake news was reported so often and became so prominent at this time that police departments around India often had to counter Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation.

The ANI bureau in Uttar Pradesh reported on April 7, 2020 that members of the Tablighi Jamaat were quarantined by the police. Police quarantine implies criminality and suggests that the Muslims in attendance were somehow dangerous. The Twitter handle of the Noida police station de-escalated this situation, stating there was no mention of the Muslim missionary group and that news channels were misquoting and spreading fake news.

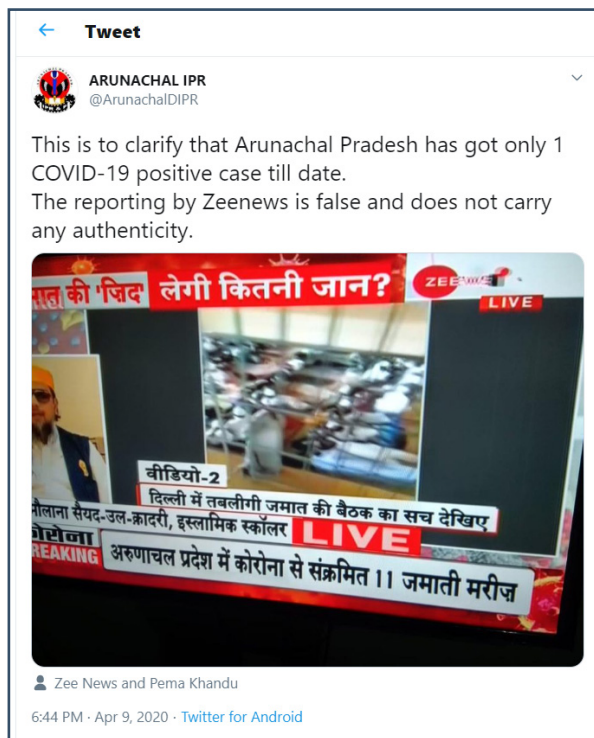


Another example is a report³² in the Hindi newspaper Amar Ujala on April 5, 2020, which claimed that Tablighi Jamaat members demanded non-vegetarian food while in quarantine in Uttar Pradesh's Saharanpur district. Supposedly, when they did not get it, they threw away the food. The Saharanpur police soon issued a statement refuting this report.



In the circular to the left, Saharanpur Police said that the story broadcast on news channels and social media platforms was completely false, per their investigation.

³² <https://thefederal.com/the-eighth-column/indian-muslims-battle-islamophobia-amid-covid-19/>



Similarly, on April 6, 2020, Zee News used its platform to show a clip claiming that the medical team escorting members of the Tablighi Jamaat who had tested positive for COVID-19 were pelted with stones in Uttar Pradesh. The Firozabad police refuted the report, asking the outlet to delete it and stated, “You are spreading false and misleading news.”

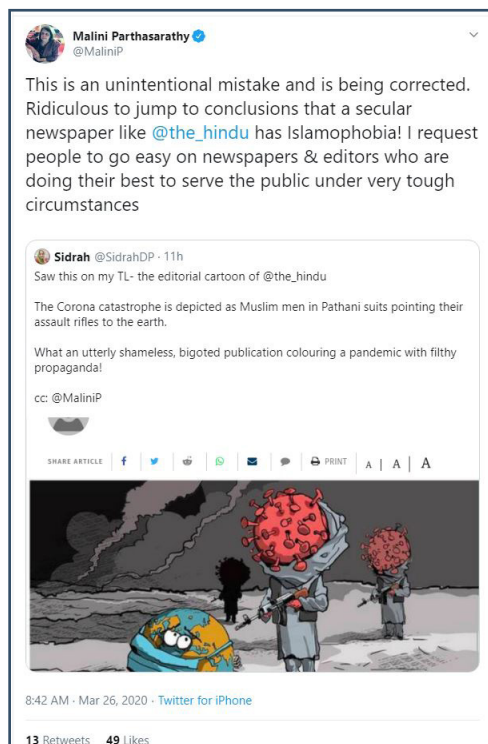
EDITORIALIZING BIGOTRY

Accompanying this amplification in mainstream media were the harmful individual statements made by many prominent journalists from English media outlets, whose personal opinions shared this harmful rhetoric. Madhu Trehan, editor-in-chief of leading online media outlet India Today, tweeted the following:



What does it say if the editor-in-chief of one of India's largest news outlets can share bigoted statements on Twitter and then argue it is not communal? As a journalist with the power to influence millions, what does this mean for the non-partisan nature of their coverage during this polarised time?

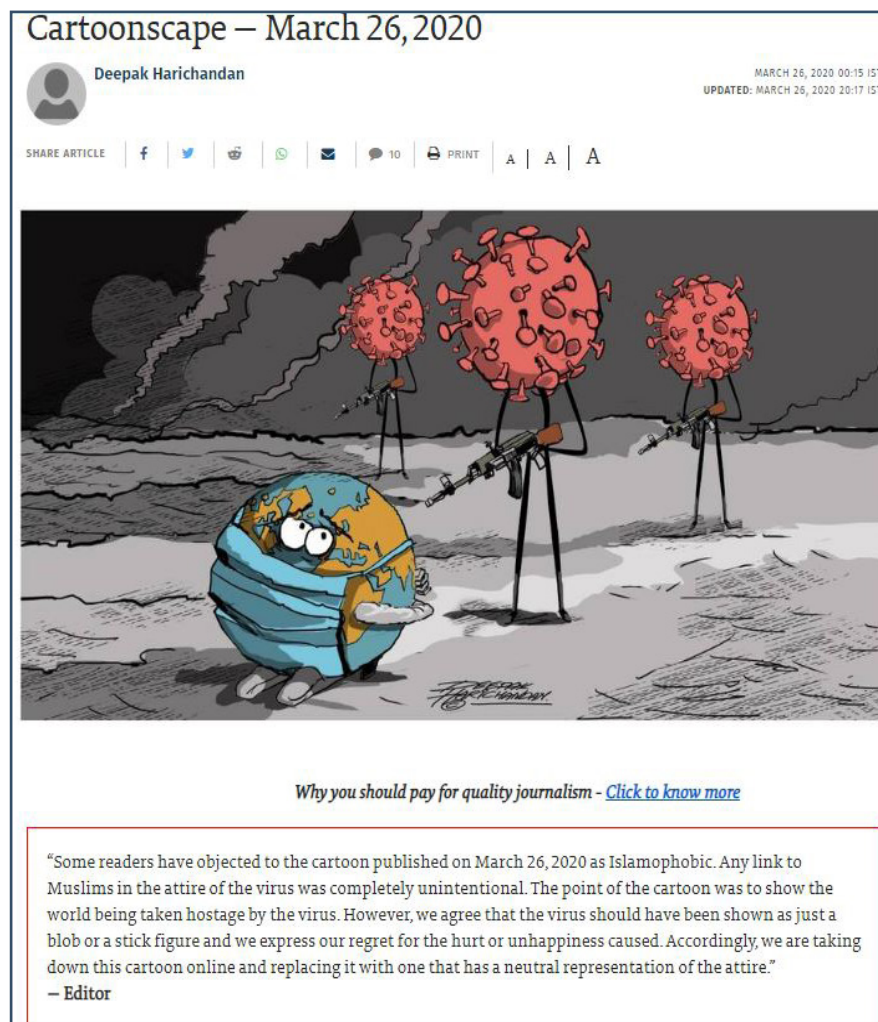
Below is an Islamophobic political cartoon published by The Hindu. The world is depicted as being held hostage by a the coronavirus "dressed" in presumably Muslim Pathani clothing, here equated to terrorist garb. After much outcry, the cartoon was edited, and the "Muslim clothes" ascribed to the virus removed.



When confronted with this deeply offensive image, the editors claimed that any link to Muslims was unintentional. Supposedly the only goal of the cartoonist was to show the world was taken “hostage” by the virus.

One of the challenges is that much of the Indian media breeds and promotes upper caste and Hindu biases that shape the terms of acceptable speech about Indian caste and religious minorities. In a culture that has so normalized Islamophobia, with Muslims so often depicted as terrorists, the visual vocabulary of hostage taking reflexively features Muslim clothing.

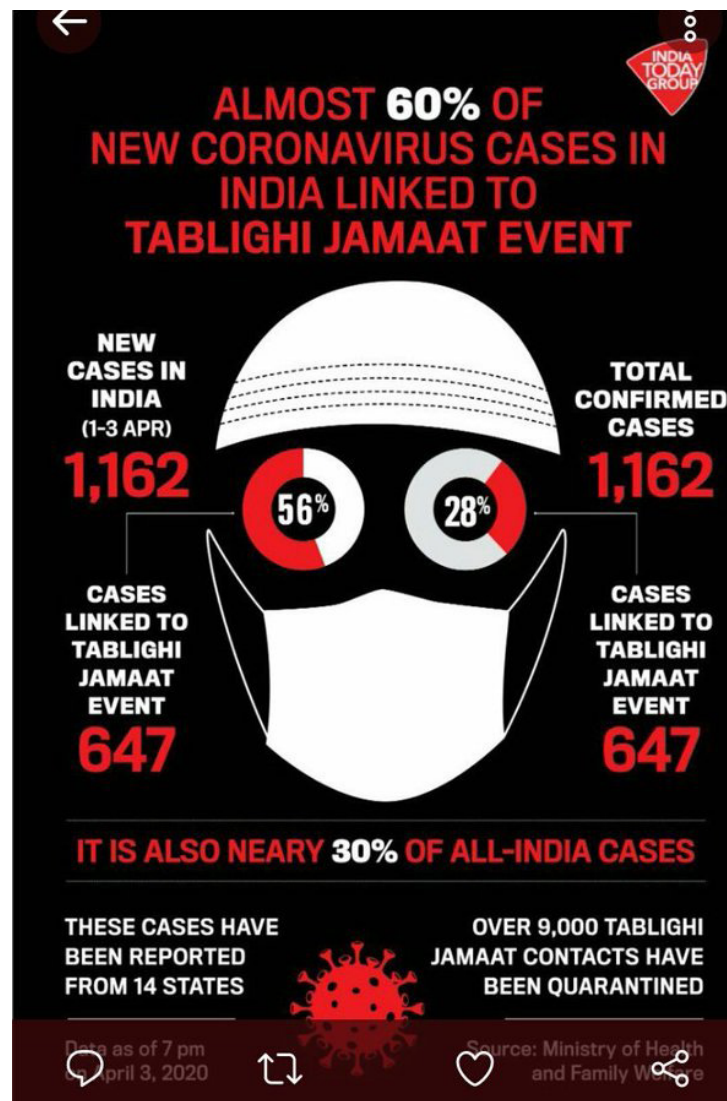
This is not an accident of an overworked editorial room, but a reflection of the deep biases of Indian newsrooms lacking cultural competencies and self-or awareness of their caste and religious biases. These cartoons show the deep challenges that arise in times of crises and what minority communities must endure along with the virus itself.



After immense public pressure, the cartoon was retracted both for its inflammatory bias and inaccuracy. However, it was too late. The damage was done as the image went viral and added further kindling to the rampage of Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation.

There was also an infographic published by India Today (featured below) that again depicts and focuses solely on the Tablighi Jamaat event. As Saugato Datta, behavioural and developmental

economist explained to Scroll,³³ “This is basically sampling bias: since people from this one cluster have been tested at very high rates, and overall testing is low, it is hardly surprising that a large proportion of overall positives is attributed to this cluster.”



As a result of this Islamophobic coverage these national news outlets portrized islamophobia as opposed to evidence based reporting that could have helped unify and build community during a frightening time for the Indian public. There are numerous ways to accurately cover COVID-19 and its outcome, by highlighting inclusive solutions, fostering harmonious collaboration between communities, and inspiring individuals to change the current ground reality.

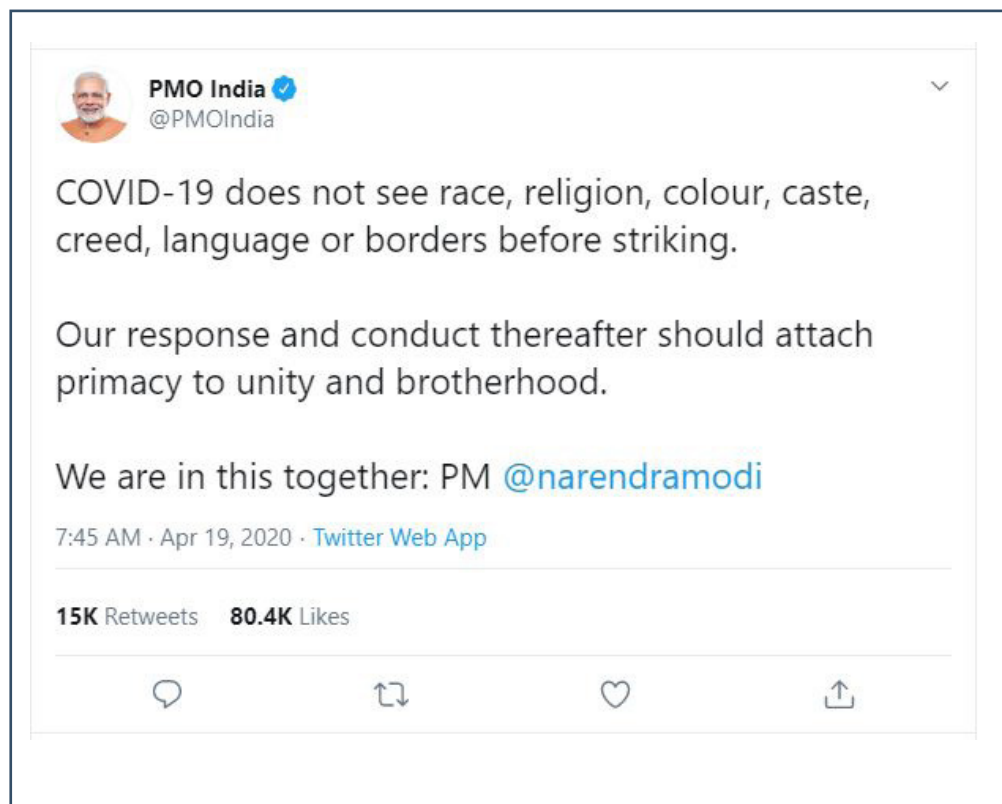
Imagine if these outlets had covered stories of mutual aid networks highlighting the work and service of Indians. This includes Muslim youth engaged in relief work during COVID-19, Muslim neighbors performing the last rites for a Hindu woman, and especially the story of the Jamaat members who have been cured of COVID-19 who volunteered to donate their plasma for the treatment of others. Instead we saw these news outlets contributing to a fearful and polarizing environment that had tragic consequences for millions of Indian muslims.

33 <https://scroll.in/article/958392/explained-sampling-bias-drove-sensationalist-reporting-around-tablighi-coronavirus-cases>

HINDU NATIONALIST FACEBOOK GROUPS COORDINATING TO AMPLIFY HATE

By observing the spread of this incendiary hashtag, we were able to monitor its growth throughout global social media. The hashtag had its origins in Twitter, but was simultaneously being pushed by BJP and Hindu Nationalist pages, many with hundreds of thousands of followers. Although they are not official verified BJP Party pages, it is critical to question why any campaign and fan pages for Prime Minister Modi, the BJP and other key figures in the Hindu nationalist leadership pipeline serve as primary disseminators of Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation. While the posts in our dataset are not a comprehensive listing of all of the sites involved in pushing Islamophobic Covid-19 hatespeech and disinformation the groups highlighted in this report have a potential audience of XYZ. Likes and Followers listed below are current as of May, 2020. Some sites may have been removed by the time of this report's publishing date.

The data reveals the partisan nature of this malicious campaign and also raise questions about the accountability of Modi and the BJP. This is particularly true when Modi issues calls for unity even as his fan pages attack Muslims in nearly all Indian languages.



PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
Narendra Modi Fan Page	130,746	170,922

<https://www.facebook.com/pmmodi1950/>



Narendra Modi
@pmmodi1950

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Like Follow Share ...

Narendra Modi
April 1 at 5:44 AM · 🌐

Most wanted.

8 Teams of Delhi Police and 2 teams of Special Task Force are conducting raids at various locations of UP, Delhi & Haryana to arrest terrorist **#MaulanaSaad** head of radical islamic organization **#TablighiJamaat**. He is underground after FIR against him.

If u have any information regarding his whereabouts immediately inform local police station

#CoronaJihad



605 57 Comments 564 Shares

Like Comment Share

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Invite your friends to like this Page

130,741 people like this

170,915 people follow this

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[www.electiontamasha.in](#)

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PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
BJP For India Page	580,573	584,927

<https://www.facebook.com/119908095332806/posts/542055869784691>



BJP For New INDIA
@Bhajafornewindia

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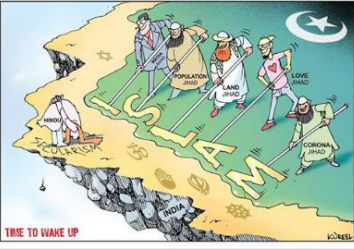


Like Follow Share ...

[Send Message](#)

BJP For New INDIA
March 31 at 6:18 AM · 🌐

Time to wake up
#CoronaJihad **#TablighiJamat** **#TableeghJamaat** **#Seva4Society**
#NIZAMMUDIN **#NizamuddinMarkaz** **#कोरोना_जिहाद** **#Coronavirustruth**
#jihadi_corona_virus



540 31 Comments 139 Shares

Like Comment Share

4.3 out of 5 - Based on the opinion of 205 people

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Invite your friends to like this Page

580,570 people like this

584,921 people follow this

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Page created - August 30, 2017

Pages Liked by This Page [>](#)

Panchayati Times [Like](#)

PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
Indian Defense Force	2,881,348	2,865,857

<https://www.facebook.com/101153386618242/posts/3061776427222575>

Indian Defence
@indiandefencecom

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Indian Defence
April 3 at 2:34 AM

#CoronaJihad These people should be behind the bars with no access to any amenities towards which an INDIAN TAX-PAYER makes his contribution to. Yesterday TOI had reported 65% of cases in India can be imputed to these mind-midgits who attended the congregation.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/.../tablighi-jamaat-patients-making...>

INDIATODAY.IN
Tablighi Jamaat patients making vulgar signs, roaming nude inside hospital: Ghaziabad CMO tells police

778 Likes · 117 Comments · 326 Shares

Like · Comment · Share

Most Relevant

Write a comment...

Sital Mandal CRPF should be deployed inside and outside of the hospital.

Like · Reply · 2d

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2,881,348 people like this
2,865,857 people follow this
Felix Anand and 35 other friends like this or have checked in

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Page created - October 6, 2010

Pages Liked by This Page
See More
भारत क्रांतिकारी... Like

PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
RSS Hindu Yuva Vahini	133,825	135,198

<https://www.facebook.com/2123993431217704/posts/2737247959892245>

RSS हिंदू युवा वाहिनी
@RSSHinduYuvaVahini

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RSS हिंदू युवा वाहिनी
April 1

बिहार के मधुबनी की मस्जिद में सामूहिक नमाज कर रहे जमातियों को रोकने पहुँची पुलिस पर हमला व गोली चलाई, जवान घायल।

यूपी के बागपत में सामूहिक नमाज रोकने गयी पुलिस पर पथराव, टांडा की मस्जिद में भी नमाज।

देश भर की मस्जिदों से निजामुद्दीन की तर्ज पर #CoronaJihad फैलाया जा रहा है।

श्री. अमित सिंह
April 1

262 Likes · 16 Comments · 90 Shares

Community
See All
133,825 people like this
134,600 people follow this

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भारत Positive Like

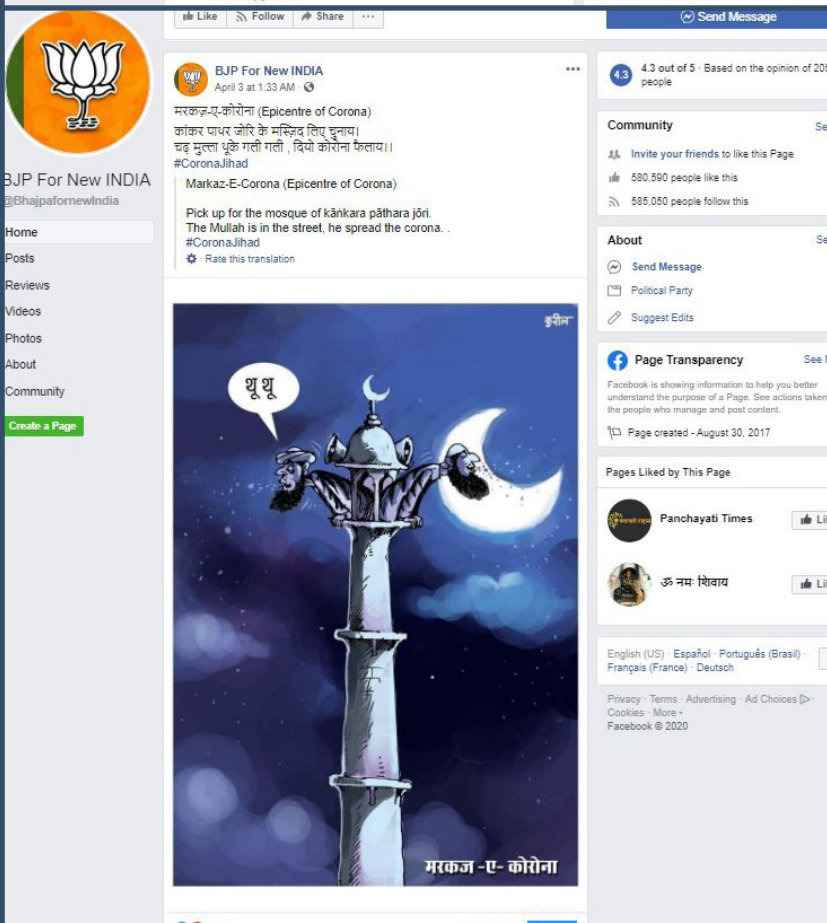
Translation of Above: The people in madhubani are having collective namaz and when the police came to stop it they were met with gundire. Soldiers were hurt.

Bagpat in UP also had collective namaz and when the police went to stop it there was stones thrown at them. Even in the masjid in Tanda there is collective namaz.

Just like the way of Nizamuddin, all the country's masjids are spreading #CoronaJihad

585,050

Like Follow Share ... Send Message





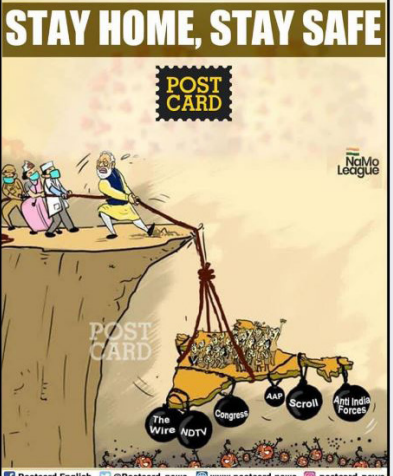
BJP For New INDIA
@Bhajafornewindia

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BJP For New INDIA
Yesterday at 5:13 AM



Postcard English @Postcard_news www.postcard.news postcard_news

4.3 out of 5 Based on the opinion of 205 people

Community
Invite your friends to like this Page
580,590 people like this
585,050 people follow this

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Pages Liked by This Page
Panchayati Times
ऊ नमः शिवाय



BJP For New INDIA
@Bhajafornewindia

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BJP For New INDIA
April 1 at 3:06 AM



Postcard English @Postcard_news www.postcard.news postcard_news

4.3 out of 5 Based on the opinion of 205 people

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ऊ नमः शिवाय



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April 1 at 3:06 AM



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ऊ नमः शिवाय

PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
Resurging Dharma	27,095	32,920

<https://www.facebook.com/281817305794953/posts/554406968535984>



Resurging Dharma
@Resurgingdharma

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Resurging Dharma
March 31 at 3:09 AM

Around 1400-1700 Peoples of peaceful community was gathered for Tablighi jamat at Nizamuddin Dargah.
This is the contribution of Peaceful community towards Corona.
Kejriwal's voters giving their bit and proudly claiming their beds in Hospitals!
#CoronaJihad




561 Likes 72 Comments 268 Shares

Like Comment Share

Most Relevant

Write a comment...

ABOUT RESURGING DHARMA

Never bend your head, always hold it high.
He can be glorified as successful, famous, blessed, valorous, meritorious and an icon of morality. T...

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32,920 people follow this

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Hours Always Open
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Page created · November 6, 2015

PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
The Great Indian Defence News In Bengali.	52,406	55,130

<https://www.facebook.com/TeamTGIDNB/>



The Great Indian Defence News In Bengali.
@TeamTGIDNB

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The Great Indian Defence News In Bengali.
April 3 at 1:13 PM

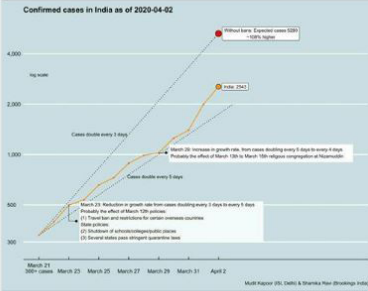
পোষ্ট পড়ার আগে ছবিতে দেওয়া গ্রাফটা ভালো করে দেখে নিন।
গ্রাফ দেখলে বুঝতে পারবেন দেশ লোক ভাটন করার ফলে করোনা আক্রান্তের সংখ্যা প্রায় অর্ধেক কমিয়ে আনা গেছে। তবে সেই সংখ্যা আরো কমানো যেতে যদি না জিহাদী জঙ্গী ভারবীণ জামাত স্বতন্ত্র করে সারা ভারতে করোনা ভাইরাস না ছড়াত। ছবিতে ২৯ শে মার্চ পর্যন্ত আনুমানিক আসতে, গ্রাফটিতে আক্রান্তের সংখ্যা প্রায় সমান্তরালে আসা লক্ষ করা যায়। অর্থাৎ, এর পরে ভারতে আক্রান্ত সংখ্যা গ্রাফে না বেরে, কমার সম্ভাবনা থাকত। কিন্তু জঙ্গী জামাতদের কুতর্কামের ফলে ২৯ তারিখের পরে হঠাৎ করেই গ্রাফের লাইন উর্ধ্বমুখী হয়ে উপরে উঠতে থাকে। অর্থাৎ ভারতে করোনা আক্রান্ত হ্রাসের হারতর হারতর থাকে।
আজ পশ্চিমবঙ্গ স্বাস্থ্যমন্ত্রক জানিয়েছে দিল্লীর ভারবীণ জামাতে অংশ নেওয়া ও তাদের সংশ্লিষ্ট আসে একজন ২১৫ জনকে কোয়ারেন্টাইন সেন্টারে রাখা হয়েছে।
#CoronaJihad
#QWIGHT

Before reading the post, please take a look at the picture.

If you see the graph, you will understand that the country's lockdown, nearly half of the number of do victims. However, the number would have been reduced, unless the jihadi militant league jamat did conspiracy and did not spread the virus all over India. In the film until March 29, the number of victims of the graph can be estimated to be nearly equal. After that, there would be a possibility of commerce in India. But after the 29th of the work of the militant jamat, suddenly the graph's line started rising. In India, the attack on India continues to be faster.

Today, West Bengal Ministry of health has said that 255 people who have been participating in the National League shirt in delhi have been placed at the quarantined centre.

#CoronaJihad
#QWIGHT
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55,130 people follow this

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PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
IITians for Nation	87,365	86,812

<https://www.facebook.com/1437637926447735/posts/2609259179285598>



IITians for Nation
@IITsforNation

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WANT TO DO SOMETHING FOR A SOLDIER, BE AN INDIAN WHO IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR

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IITians for Nation
April 2 at 10:48 PM · 🌐

#CoronaJihad is mainstream now.

Tweet

TIMES NOW @TimesNow

Those who die as a result of COVID-19 are martyrs, says @aimim_national president @asadowaisi.



Those who die as a result of COVID-19 are martyrs, says AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi
timesnownews.com

3:28 · 03 Apr 20 · TweetDeck

81 Retweets 224 Likes

4.2 out of 5 · Based on the opinion of 417 people

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87,365 people like this

86,812 people follow this

Mukesh Kabir likes this

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Atul Chandrakant Nikam B...
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India Against Presstitu...
Wa Ajtov likes this
Nonprofit Organization

Pages Liked by This Page

PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
West Bengal BJP Supporters	327,297	357,868

<https://www.facebook.com/Bengal4BJP/> @Bengal4BJP



West Bengal BJP Supporters
@Bengal4BJP

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West Bengal BJP Supporters
April 2 at 3:47 AM · 🌐

হায়দ্রাবাদের কোয়ারেন্টিন সেন্টারের ভেতরের ছবি
#CoronaJihad

Inside Picture of kôyârêntina center in Hyderabad
#CoronaJihad

Rate this translation



67 Comments 94 Shares

Community See All

Invite your friends to like this Page

327,297 people like this

357,868 people follow this

Bankim S and 1 other like this

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Page created · June 19, 2014

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23,791

Discussion

49

PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
India Speaks Daily	28,591	35,010

<https://www.facebook.com/IndiaSpeaksDaily/>

Followed by Saurabh and 35,009 others

India Speaks Daily
@IndiaSpeaksDaily
35K followers

IndiaSpeaksDaily.com is a revolutionary Views portal where stories are based on truth and in-depth research...

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India Speaks Daily
April 1 at 2:25 AM

#BigBreaking मधुबनी जिला में एक मस्जिद में मौजूद लोगों को निकालने गई पुलिस पर मस्जिद में हमला किया गया। चारों ओर गोलाबारी चलाई गई। कई पुलिसकर्मी घायल हुए।
By Journalist Ashok Shrivastav
यानी कोरोना.विवाद सच है. अब तो यकीन हुआ? #CoronaJihad

#BigBreaking in madhubani #. A Mosque was attacked by the mosque on the police. Stones and bullets were fired. Many policemen injured. By Journalist ashok shrivastav

Means Corona-Jihad is true, now believe it? #CoronaJihad
Rate this translation



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IndiaSpeaksDaily.com is a revolutionary Views portal where stories are based on truth and in-depth research. Please follow us on Twitter @IndiaSpeaks10

401 Videos
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#YouTube चैनल के सक्रिय सदस्य बनें...

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Invite your friends to like this Page
28,591 people like this
35,010 people follow this
Lokhande Saurabh likes this or has checked in

PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
Dr. Swamy Fans	61,983	102,118

<https://www.facebook.com/SwamyFans/?eid=ARCcaenVb6lE1bHfMSr7M3pjlg0idn09DNDEmyn8XLCb7xMOBWig-uyMTYBD8TiPqzI9EGddO-vifvIG>

SwamyFans
Public group
About



[Join Group](#) [More](#) Join this group to post and comment.

Mahesh Joshi
April 2 at 4:35 AM
They Can go to Any Extent... New Face of Terrorism #CoronaJihad



GROUP BY
Dr. Swamy Fans
61,983 like this

DESCRIPTION
This group is created by Dr Swamy's fans. The purpose of the gro... See More

GROUP TYPE
General

LOCATION
India
This location is set based on your group's description.

RECENT GROUP PHOTOS See All

43 Comments 488 Shares

PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
Congress MukT Bharat	67,968	

https://www.facebook.com/groups/588584224918244/?ref=group_header

NamoBharat

Public group

[Join Group](#) [More](#) Join this group to post and comment.

Mander Dilip Joshi
14 hrs
Beware
#CoronaJihad
केवल दृष्टान्त सोचिये, कोई असली नोट फोड़कर नहीं जायेगा। बाकी जो है, सो हेयवी है।
Beware
#CoronaJihad
Just think so much, no one will leave the real note. The rest that is, is so here.
[Rate this translation](#)

1 Share

[Like](#) [Share](#)

Congress MukT Bharat
67,968 likes · like this · [Send Message](#)

DESCRIPTION
अव्यय भारत, अटल भारत
नयी भारत, स्वच्छ भारत
🇮🇳🇮🇳🇮🇳
GROUP TYPE
Social Learning

LOCATION
Ludhiana, Punjab, India

RECENT GROUP PHOTOS [See All](#)

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PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
Organizer	47,150	47,350

Organiser - Weekly
Yesterday at 10:03 PM

#CoronaJihad Muslim group insults Tamil migrant workers, denigrates Hindu Gods and rituals in Malappuram under the garb of Corona relief work (Video)

ORGANISER.ORG
#CoronaJihad Muslim group insults Tamil migrant workers, denigrates Hindu Gods and rituals in Malappuram under the...

111K VIEWS · 1.5K LIKES · 110K SHARES

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4.3 out of 5 · Based on the opinion of 340 people

Community [See All](#)

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47,150 people like this
47,350 people follow this
Ram Kumar and 5 other friends like this or have checked in

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2322, Paharganj, Laxmi Narayan street, Chuna Mandi
New Delhi 110055
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PAGE	LIKES	FOLLOWERS
Hindu Jwala : హిందు జ్వాల	73,510	75,020

<https://www.facebook.com/282635738469513/posts/2912333852166342>

Hindu Jwala : హిందు జ్వాల
@HinduJwala3

Home

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This is what is called #coronajihad.
#Coronajihad #China #Jihad #Virus #ChinaVirus
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Mujeeb Mohammad updated his profile picture.
10 hrs

Let's join hands, go out and sneeze with open mouth in public.
Spread the Virus

కరోనా జ్వేడ???

SPREAD THE WORD
TO END THE WORD

134 23 Comments 195 Shares

Like Comment Share

Community

Invite your friends to like this Page

73,554 people like this
75,560 people follow this

Ettyala Vankataiah Shaky likes this

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April 4 at 5:23 AM

हवलीगी जमात का असली चेहरा!
#Corona_Jihad
#Tableeg_Jamat
(Pic Credit : Manoj Kureel from Twitter)
See Translation

कुरील

सैनीटाइजेशन प्लीज

बूबू बूबू

कम भला तो...

20 Comments 330 Shares

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Our Story

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In this caricature, the cartoonist Manoj Kureel depicts a health worker trying to help a member of the Tablighi Jamaat by spraying sanitizer on him and in return is spat on.

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Corona Jihad

#CoronaJihad #TablighiJamaat
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#टीवी पर सच्चाई आई_मुहल्लूपाकर_भागें_दंगाई
#टीवी_देखना_बंद_करो



WAR FROM TWO FRONTS

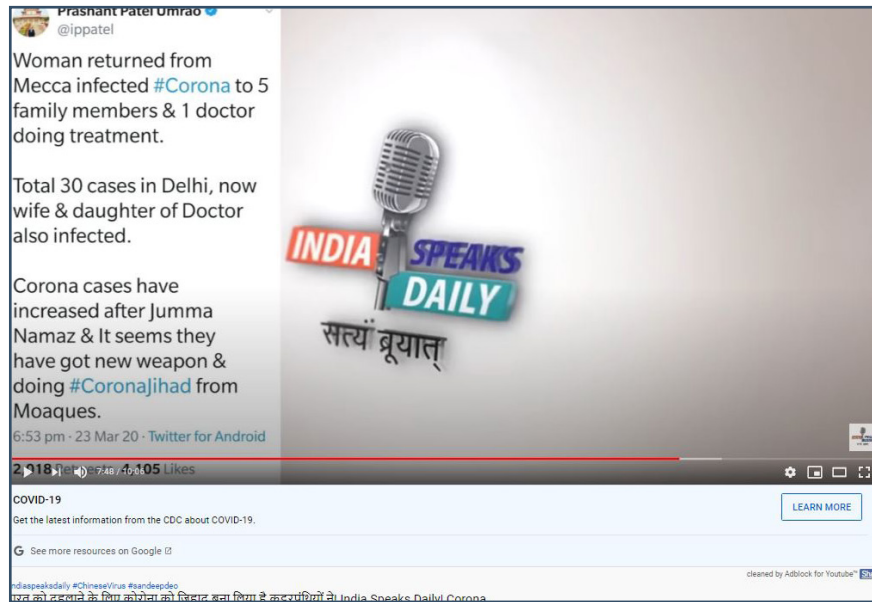
11

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YOUTUBE

Our team also found extensive Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation on YouTube. Videos of misinformation about how the virus spreads have also circulated unabated on the platform. Examples offered here are exactly that -- examples of the kind of content easily found on the platform.

A video on the India Speaks Daily's channel opens with the line, "Jihadi and extremist Muslims are roaming around in this country like a corona bomb."³⁴



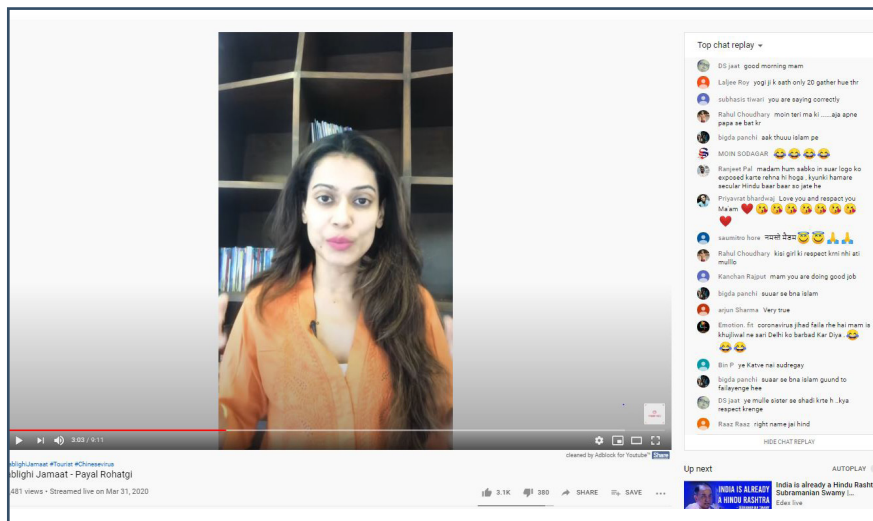
Another video, sourced from the website "Panchjanya," explains that owing to Muslim hate towards PM Modi along with supposed illiteracy and ignorance, Muslims have purposely infected others with coronavirus. The website also features Twitter content, demonstrating the continued cross-pollination of Twitter hate speech on other social media platforms. This video has been viewed nearly 100,000 times.



Excerpt from Panchjanya where the headline reads: Coronajihad : Extremist Muslims did not care about the country

³⁴ 'Jihadi aur kattarpanti Mussalman corona bomb ke roop mein is desh mein ghoom rahe hain' is the hindi text from the video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InCT4yVf9vM>

Right-wing influencer Payal Rohatgi has frequently spread misinformation and hate on YouTube. In this particular video,³⁵ she not only repeatedly refers to COVID-19 as a “Chinese virus,” but also falsely claims that the Tablighi Jamaat organized their congregation in the Nizamuddin Markaz in New Delhi after the lockdown orders by the Central government.



YouTube has also provided a platform to Islamophobic Hindu monk Narsingh Vani. Popularly known as “India’s Virathu,” a nod to his anti-Muslim rhetoric, his channel has 229k subscribers and makes similar calls for Muslim boycott and Hindu holy war.



On April 1, 2020, when invited to appear by the right-wing Sudarshan TV, he shared a video featuring Narsingh Vani, who claimed that Muslims were spreading Corona Jihad by spitting on people.³⁶ He also linked the Tableeghi Jamaat to ISIS, Taliban and Al Qaeda. The video has over 27,000 views.



³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YC02VL824WE>

³⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVFSm1Tmytg>

#CORONAJIHAD - ONLINE AND OFFLINE VIOLENCE

“They said ‘who gave you permission to give food? You are a Muslim, you guys mix poison and spit on food before distributing. Have you guys come from Nizamuddin and want to spread the disease to everyone?’”- Zeerin, a Muslim Activist distributing relief in Bengaluru.³⁷

As hate hashtags circulate online Indian Muslims face threats of violence in real life. Online hate speech has real consequences. On April 5, 2020, for example, a man committed suicide on in Una district of Himachal Pradesh. His family alleged that villagers had targeted and bullied him over the spread of coronavirus following the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in the country’s capital.³⁸

A day earlier, in Rajasthan’s Bharatpur district, a doctor refused to admit a pregnant woman, citing her being Muslim as a cause for concern. She was forced to deliver in an ambulance, and her child did not survive.³⁹

Vendors and relief workers across the country have been subjected to violence and open discrimination, which can largely be attributed to the hate that social media platforms and other mainstream media have propagated. Right-wing politicians have also contributed to Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation, triggering more violence and hate.⁴⁰

Photos circulating from a Muslim neighborhood in Kolkata, as well as others in Pakistan, claim to show that Muslims are flouting social distancing norms. Not surprisingly, the images were shared by Indian politicians, including the Governor of Meghalaya in northeast India. Fact-checking websites confirmed that these images are more than 12 years old.

GLOBALIZATION OF #CORONAJIHAD

Because Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation has not been addressed on these platforms, attacks against Muslims have increased around the world as global Islamophobic actors mobilize behind this bigotry.

Notorious Islamophobes and groups like Act for America, Pamela Gellar,⁴¹ Amy Mek,⁴² Jihad Watch,⁴³ Neal Boortz,⁴⁴ Andy Ngo,⁴⁵ Katie Hopkins,⁴⁶ Maria Wirth,⁴⁷ and Tommy Robinson⁴⁸ have all been active in propagating hate online. Below is a sample of this content:

³⁷ <https://in.news.yahoo.com/covid-19-muslims-muslim-volunteers-102658727.html>

³⁸ <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/himachal/taunted-over-coronavirus-spread-after-tablighi-meet-himachal-man-commits-suicide-65978>

³⁹ <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/rajasthan-doctor-refuses-to-admit-pregnant-woman-because-she-s-muslim-her-child-dies-after-delivery-1663352-2020-04-04>

⁴⁰ <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/apr/28/watch--uttar-pradesh-bjp-mla-tells-people-not-to-buy-vegetables-from-muslim-vendors-2136480.html>

⁴¹ <https://archive.vn/37oyC>

⁴² <https://archive.vn/LpYlq>

⁴³ <https://archive.ph/vQoxd>

⁴⁴

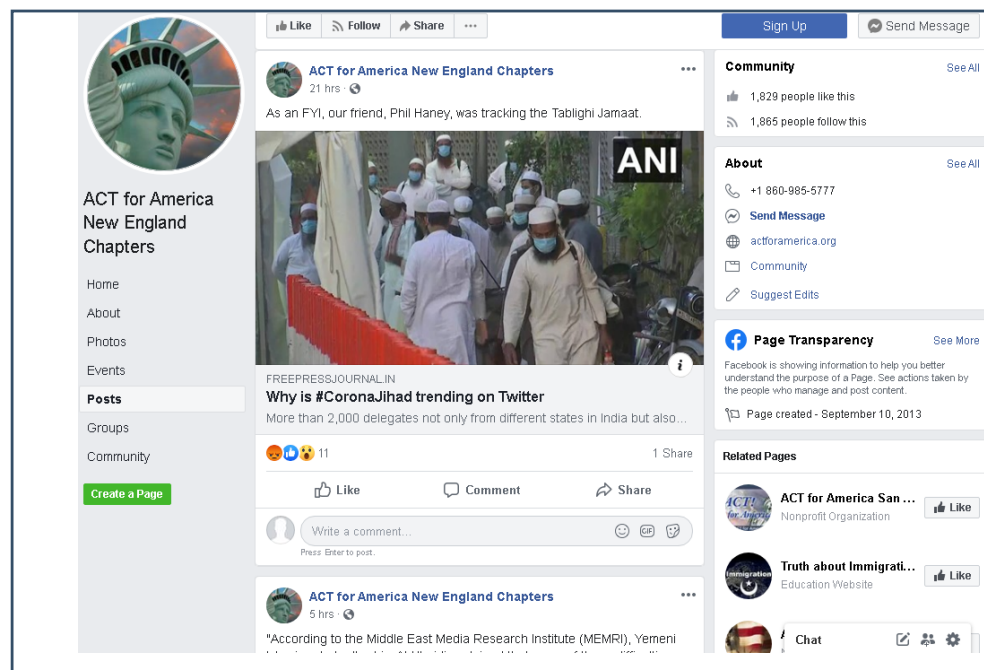
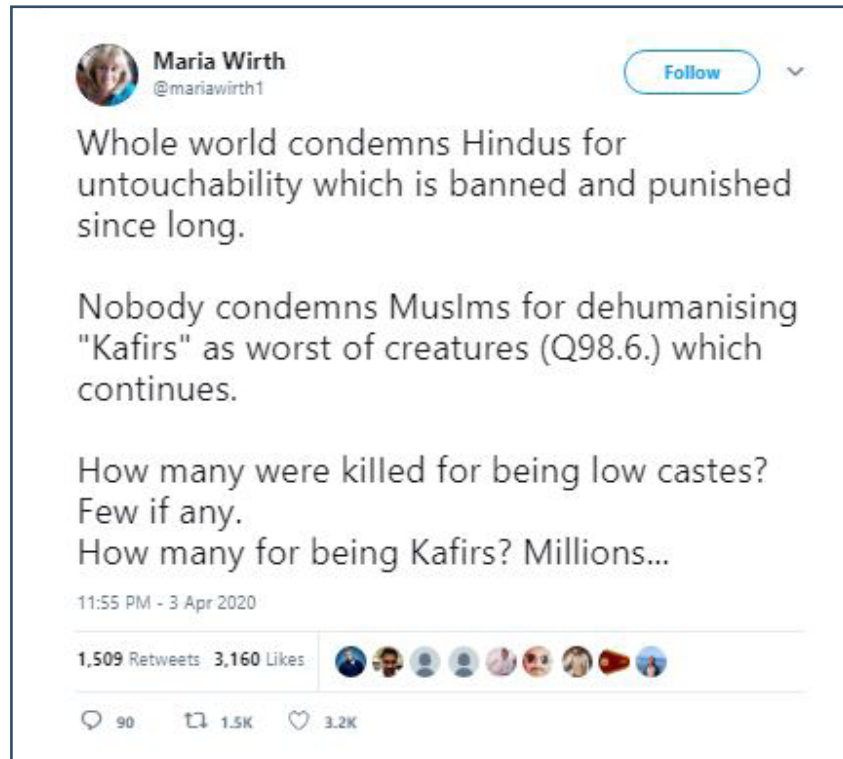
⁴⁵

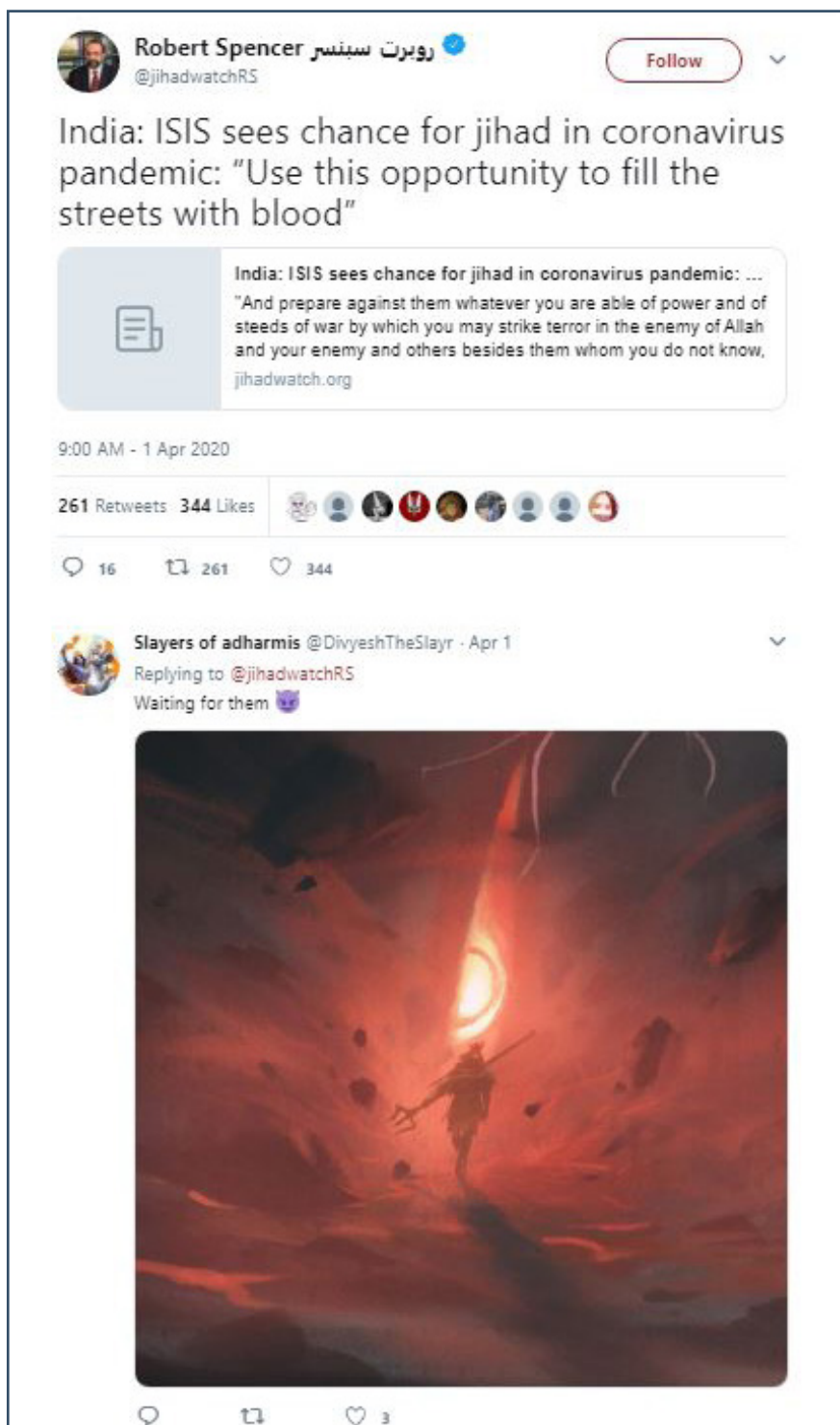
⁴⁶ <https://twitter.com/KTHopkins/status/1243625444139769858>

⁴⁷ <https://archive.ph/3uXaq>

⁴⁸









♥ Larisse ♥ LOVES GOD the NRA & USA! ♥
@loves_nra

ISIS tells T*RRORISTS to avoid traveling to Europe for Jihad because of the #Coronavirus.

Anyone else want to join me in celebrating that our country has been infected with this virus as well?!



📍 thegatewaypundit.com/2020/03/isis-t... via @gatewaypundit



ISIS Tells Terrorists to Avoid Travelling to Europe For Jihad Because of Coronavirus
ISIS has officially advised terrorists not to travel to Europe to do attacks because they might catch coronavirus. The terror organization has previously encouraged...
thegatewaypundit.com

6:17 PM · Mar 15, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

324 Retweets 338 Likes



@Formerworshiper

Muslims pray on the road, in Wembley central in London cause the mosque is closed by the chairman of masjid during corona virus.

Look at their arrogance! And some of western feminist, atheist & Islamists always labelling us as an islamphobia cause we hate the behavior! Fuck!!





Online hate has boiled over into physical violence around the world in places such as Germany,⁴⁹ the UK and the US.

Iman Atta, the director of Tell Mama, which measures anti-Muslim hate crimes across the U.K., told Newsweek that her organization had noticed a “rise in online anti-Muslim hate incidents” during the coronavirus pandemic.⁵⁰ Atta said that a number of false narratives had been spread online about Muslims flouting lockdown rules, including the claim that “Muslims were congregating outside mosques and thereby spreading coronavirus.”

In a recent incident in the U.K., a Muslim woman wearing a hijab and a protective mask overheard a man in a supermarket say to his partner “look, a bomb” as he pointed at her. Roxana Khan-Williams, who co-authored the report, warned that anti-Muslim hatred and conspiracy theories were “penetrating common-sense thinking.” She told The Independent that during her research, she saw examples of people who were not being deliberately Islamophobic but

⁴⁹ <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/turkish-family-receives-racist-coronavirus-infected-letter-as-Islamophobia-grows-in-germany/news>

⁵⁰ <https://www.newsweek.com/islam-muslims-coronavirus-lockdown-ramadan-Islamophobia-1498499>

“were seeing this fake news and absorbing it.”^v

Furthermore, in the U.S., we have seen continued attacks against Muslims, including a mosque destroyed by arson in Missouri.⁵¹ This hate crime comes in the context of Donald Trump stoking Islamophobia. He claimed to see a “great disparity” in the treatment of mosques and churches during Ramadan and Easter, implying that authorities would grant special treatment to mosques during COVID 19 lockdown as a form of muslim appeasement.⁵² The need to stop more Islamophobic attacks in the US is now more urgent than ever. Immediate action is needed.

51 <https://www.metrotimes.com/news-hits/archives/2020/04/28/nicholas-proffitt-suspect-in-islamic-center-arson-has-a-history-of-attacking-mosques-including-one-in-dearborn?fbclid=IwAR0WA9qMXaE95IPrNyh1UZXTX-pLjDLASOnFPje3H7EhLXabPCWjMVqOamJI>

52 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/muslim-doctors-covid-19-coronavirus_n_5eb0691dc5b607baecd608d0

CONCLUSION

We urge social media platforms to take responsibility for content posted by their users and to cooperate with representatives of Indian and Muslim civil society, healthcare experts and internet freedom activists to staunch the spread of Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech online. Twitter and Facebook should act immediately to mitigate specific risks during the pandemic, be more aggressive about the platform's impact on the physical safety and fundamental human rights of India's most vulnerable communities and block Islamophobic coronavirus-related hate speech and disinformation from their platforms.

Imagine the difficulties of trying to survive a pandemic, only to face discrimination that systematically obstructs your right to healthcare. This is what is happening to Indian Muslims and has now started to spread across the world.

The virus itself does not discriminate. The COVID-19 pandemic forces us to realize how interdependent we are. Lack of access to health care, resulting from bias and violence against Muslims, will not remain confined to Muslim communities but have terrible repercussions for all of our communities. We must act swiftly to mitigate the harm of Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The COVID-19 global pandemic highlights historic inequalities and disproportionately impacts those most vulnerable. This disproportionate impact is correlated with a rise in disinformation and hate speech. This not only harms impacted minorities but also prevents accurate scientifically informed public health information from reaching the public and can exacerbate spread while extending the pandemic for all.

That is why tracking hate speech and disinformation is crucial for it allows us to improve content moderation as well as data collection on social disparities in health, risk and mortality. Content moderation is a complex practice requiring sensitivity to the relevant context and extensive socio-political expertise. With collaboration from civil society advocates and academic experts, improvements in content moderation and data analysis can mitigate harms otherwise invisible or misunderstood.

Who should act immediately to address disinformation and health disparity? We suggest that social media platforms, which sit at the nexus of information sharing and public health, can and must take immediate steps to mitigate the harm to historically vulnerable populations.

Social media platforms must act immediately to curb the spread of Islamophobic COVID-19 disinformation and hate speech. Below, we outline four urgent and necessary steps towards achieving this outcome:

REMOVE INCITEMENT

Social media platforms must prioritize the removal and prevention of Islamophobic COVID-19 related disinformation and hate speech immediately. Content that could be stopped with more attentive moderation spreads on these platforms. Delays in addressing this problem mean damage done to hundreds of millions of people. Removal and prevention efforts must take into account the sociopolitical history of Islamophobia and consider how existing white supremacist

and Hindu Nationalist networks have contributed to this moment.

Acting with proper knowledge of local contexts is key to prevention. Content moderators should consult with experts in Indian civil society, health care professionals and internet freedom advocates.

AUDIT IMPACT

Twitter and Facebook must prioritize an aggressive and thorough human rights audit of the following:

- Their platform's impact on hate speech and religiously motivated related violence.
- Their hiring practices, especially with respect to safety, policy and content moderation teams.
- Content moderation, which should include reviewing hiring practices of contractor firms, contractor demographics and slur lists. These lists should be open and transparent to the public.
- Each platform's policies concerning dangerous hate groups.
- What precipitates investigations, particularly in the case of coordinated discriminatory behavior.
- Biases in the process of identification and verification of accounts.
- Impacts across India's discrete language markets.
- Determinations regarding risk prevention, mitigation and remediation plans for vulnerable communities.

The audit should be in line with U.N. Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, which affirms that just as governments have a duty to protect human rights, so too companies have a responsibility. Facebook and Twitter should conduct Human Rights Impact Assessments to analyze their actual and potential Human Rights Impact. Their findings would then inform a revision of policies and practices to address the human rights risks identified.

Additionally, each platform should empower an independent audit team approved and monitored by civil society advocates, internet freedom experts and the companies. An independent audit should be conducted by a firm jointly agreed upon by civil society advocates and the companies. This audit team must demonstrate clear competencies in caste, religious, gender and queer issues with expertise in both Indian and U.S. market plus include members of Indian minorities.

PROMOTE DIALOGUE

We recommend that Twitter and Facebook engage in a more transparent dialogue with internet freedom experts, Muslim civil society advocates and public health officials to promote advocacy, intervention, education and training. We recommend regularly convening a working group of Indian internet freedom and civil society groups to consider issues of Islamophobia as well as caste, religious and gender/queer discrimination. This group would review policies and processes at this crucial time.

In addition, we recommend convening an international working group to address Islamophobic COVID-19 disinformation and hate speech. This group should encompass such global

stakeholders as Muslim Advocates, Tell Mama, Hope Not Hate, Equality Labs, Indian American Muslim Council, Witness and others with essential cultural competencies.

ASSIST SURVIVORS

Twitter and Facebook must establish a remediation and diversity fund for survivors of violence that results from the platform. Countless lives have been impacted by violence incited online, so there must be remediation.

SUPPORT FACT CHECKING PLATFORMS

The only widespread counter to Islamophobic COVID-19 hate speech and disinformation has been fact checking platforms that are inundated with the job of vetting viral violent content. Twitter and Facebook should continue to invest generously into these platforms. Additionally, there needs to be more co-design to understand better integration of fact checks into social media platforms so that fact check content can rank higher than trended violent content. We suggest that Twitter and Facebook continue to fund these groups as part of their structural response to this issue.

The actions of American companies have global consequences. The consequences of inaction on these issues are dire. Without a concerted effort to protect Muslim and caste oppressed lives, we fear a catastrophic outcome for millions. We urge Twitter and Facebook to heed this warning and attend to our report.